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[“THEN, IN PROOF OF YOUR AMIABILITY, PLAY TO ME—IF ONLY A LITTLE.”]

## THE MISTRESS OF LYNWOOD.

—30—

### CHAPTER IV.

To Nathalie Egerton, as she walked back home after parting with Hugh Cleveland, a subtle change seemed to have come over the world. Never before had the sunshine been so bright, never had the sky been so blue, or the golden air so full of softness and perfume. A spell was on everything, which, like an enchanter's wand, turned all things into beauty.

She did not stay to reason that the alteration was in herself, not in the objects by which she was surrounded. A new element had entered her life, and its influence lay on her thoughts. She had been sad enough in the morning when she wandered out, brooding over her troubles, and the difficulties in which her father had involved himself; but now the remembrance of these slipped away, and she only recollected that she was young, and her youth was crowned by love, “The crown of all humanity.”

Cleveland had wished to come back with her, and acquaint her father immediately with his suit, but to this the young girl had objected, for she knew Mr. Egerton would be in no frame of mind to listen to a lover's pleadings until after the departure of Mr. Farquhar—the man to whom the Egerton estates were mortgaged.

Cleveland had reluctantly acquiesced in the wisdom of her decision, and had promised not to make any communication to Mr. Egerton until permitted by Nathalie herself, who, however, agreed to meet him the next evening in the park.

When she got to the house she was told her father was engaged with a strange gentleman, and had desired not to be disturbed. So she proceeded at once to her own room, where she remained, wrapped in pleasant dreams, until it was time to dress for dinner.

For some reason or other she took more pains than usual with her attire that night, and they were fully justified by the result, for she had never looked handsomer. Her dress, after all, was shabby enough when seen by daylight, for it was an old black silk that she had trimmed up herself with Chantilly laces

but the lace was good, and formed a splendid contrast to the creamy pallor of her throat and neck, while bunches of scarlet geraniums, pinned in her hair and at her bosom, lent her just the colour her dark costume needed. Her large eyes flashed superbly, the carmine in her cheeks was brighter than the flowers themselves, and, as she walked into the drawing-room, her manner was instinct with a certain joyous grace, that also made itself felt in all her movements, and gave her beauty an added charm.

She found her father already there, engaged in conversation with a tall man in evening dress, who turned round and looked at her as she entered.

“My dear,” said Mr. Egerton, somewhat nervously; “allow me to introduce Mr. Farquhar to you. My daughter, Miss Egerton.”

The gentleman bowed, murmuring some conventional sentences indicative of his pleasure at meeting her, and then offered his arm to conduct her to dinner—for at that moment the bell rang.

He was rather a handsome man than otherwise—or would have been but for the pecu-

liarly hard expression in his pale grey eyes, and the thinness of his lips, which betokened a cold and cruelly determined disposition. It was not very difficult to discover that by birth he was not a gentleman, although of late years he had travelled much, and seen a good deal of the world, whose ways his naturally shrewd intelligence had enabled him to pick up and imitate.

He could talk well, and this evening it was evident he exerted himself for the benefit of Nathalie, who was unusually bright and vivacious, and had resolved to make an appeal to her father's creditor on her father's behalf.

The two gentlemen did not linger long over their wine after she left, but joined her in the drawing-room, where she was softly striking chords on the piano. Mr. Farquhar at once came to her side.

"You play, Miss Egerton?"

"If I answered you graciously, and said 'a little,' you would accuse me of giving a stereotyped reply, and yet it would be a true one."

"Indeed! you must forgive me, but I certainly am inclined to doubt it, although I consider your versatility unimpeachable. Your face is a musical one, your voice is music itself, so you will acknowledge I have some premises for the conclusion I have drawn."

Nathalie laughed lightly.

"You flatter me, Mr. Farquhar."

"Indeed, no; I only speak as I feel. Flattery implies that its object cannot be perfection, so you will readily see that it is out of my power to flatter you."

"What a courtly speech! Really, Mr. Farquhar, you must remember I am not a London belle, who is accustomed to those compliments, and can take them for what they are worth; but a young lady who has never been to town in her life, and who is inclined to believe people mean what they say."

"If he repeated the entire in this speech, Mr. Farquhar determined to ignore it."

"It is simply you cannot spend a season or two in London; you would enjoy society, for you are peculiarly fitted to be one of its queens."

Nathalie did not like this florid style of compliment, but she knew how her father was placed with regard to this man, and so resolved not to offend him by the rebuke she would so willingly have uttered.

"I have no doubt I should enjoy it very much, as you say," she answered, smiling; "but as I have hitherto done without it, I do not miss its absence, you see."

"All beautiful women like admiration," observed Mr. Farquhar, with a low laugh, "whether it is a duchess, covered with diamonds, in her box at the opera, or a housemaid accepting a flower from an amorous policeman—the principle holds as good in one case as the other."

"Really," said Nathalie, a little coldly, and raising her head with a slight gesture of hauteur, "I do not see the relevance of your remark."

"Don't you? I was only following out my own train of thought—a rather inconvenient trick, I acknowledge, and one I must endeavour to break myself of. I hope I have not offended you, Miss Egerton?"

"Oh, no! I have no right to be offended, for I certainly did not for a moment suppose I had in any way suggested the observation. I only wanted it explained."

"Then in proof of your amiability, play to me—if only 'a little!'"

"With pleasure, or I'll sing if you would like it better," she said, and took up one of Sullivan's songs that was lying on a chair at her side.

Her voice was a contralto, full, rich and deep, and whatever might be her qualities as pianiste, it was clear she was a thorough musician, for she managed it perfectly, and sang with exquisite taste and expression, as well as considerable execution.

Farquhar turned the leaves over for her, and

thought to himself what a magnificent creature she looked, in her shabby lace, and the crimson flowers shining out like a vivid fire, from amongst the dark plaits of her hair.

He admired handsome women in the abstract, but he told himself he had never met one who so immediately fascinated him as did this daughter of Egerton's.

"Thank you," he said, as she finished, "you have, indeed, given me a great treat. I shall remember it as long as I live."

Nathalie rose from her seat, and crossed over to her father, who, from the opposite side of the room, had been watching her and her companion very intently, and, as it seemed, with some uneasiness, which, however, he did his best to conceal.

The young girl, although she would have hesitated confessing it, did not quite like the intent manner in which Mr. Farquhar's light grey eyes were fixed on her face—there was something "uncanny" in his scrutiny, at least to her imaginative fancy, and for the rest of the evening she did not leave her father's side, so that there was no further opportunity for the visitor to utter his fulsome compliments.

The drawing-room was a magnificent apartment, so far as size and proportions went, and the furniture had once been quite in keeping with it, but not even the grey hairs of Mr. Egerton himself told a tale of years more plainly than did those inlaid chairs and couches!

Mr. Farquhar's eyes roved round, noticing the faded splendours of damask and gilding.

"This is just a room I should take pleasure in furnishing," he observed; "I have a suite of blue and white furniture in my London house that looks out of place in a medium-sized room, but which would suit this one perfectly!"

Nathalie cast an alarmed glance at her father—was Mr. Farquhar already calculating on what he would do when he became master here? She caught her breath uncontrollably as the idea flashed across her brain, and in order to get rid of it began to talk quickly and randomly.

"Do you play chess?" Mr. Farquhar asked presently, and, on her replying in the affirmative, he added, "I should like a game with you, if you don't mind?"

The table was drawn out, and the game commenced.

Nathalie rather prided herself on her skill, but she soon found it was far inferior to that of her adversary, who secured a easy victory.

"It is not often I am beaten!" she said, with a shade of pique in her voice; "you are an exceptionally good player, Mr. Farquhar!"

"Yes," he responded, with a peculiar smile, "I flatter myself I usually triumph in games of skill—especially if I have made up my mind to win!"

When Nathalie had gone to bed, the two gentlemen retired to Mr. Egerton's study in order to smoke, and, after they had remained silent for some time—both, apparently, lost in thought—Farquhar said,—

"By-the-by, Egerton, I have never seen your daughter before!"

"There was no necessity for your seeing her," replied the elder man, coldly; "our relations have been purely of a business character!"

"Yes—up to the present; but I am glad I have at length been admitted into your private circle. I admire Miss Egerton very much."

Mr. Egerton made no response—apparently Farquhar's admiration was to him a matter of small moment.

"Is she engaged?" inquired the money-lender, suddenly and abruptly.

"Engaged! No, certainly not. She is very young."

"Old enough to be married I should judge. She would make a splendid mistress of a man's house."

The speaker paused for a few minutes, and watched the blue wreaths of smoke as they ascended from his cigar.

"Do you know, Egerton," he continued,

taking the cigar from his mouth, and looking at it critically, "it has struck me lately that I should be happier if I married and settled down. I have made enough money to justify my retiring and taking up a certain position by virtue of it. Now, I think your daughter would make me an admirable wife."

His hearer started violently. Evidently the idea was one that had never before suggested itself, and considerably startled him; but whatever may have been his sentiments he judged it wiser to keep them to himself.

"What do you say to receiving me as a son-in-law?" queried Farquhar, who was watching him intently.

"Really, I am not quite in a position to express an opinion," was the confused reply. "It is the very last notion that would have entered my head."

"And I perceive it is not exactly a welcome one."

"It is true," said Mr. Egerton, gaining courage. "I had formed other views with regard to Nathalie. Her beauty and the name she bears give me a right to expect a brilliant marriage for her."

"Beauty and position count for very little in this mercenary age, when money is the power that sways mankind," interrupted Farquhar, with a sneer, which he was at no pains to conceal. "It is very improbable—forgive my plain speaking—that Miss Egerton will receive a better offer than mine. I am a rich man—a very rich man, and in the matter of settlements you would find me liberal enough. Besides," he fixed his keen eyes on the old man—"if I became your daughter's husband, instead of pressing for the money you owe me, and which I am aware, you are quite unable to pay, I should give an undertaking to allow you full enjoyment of it during your life, so that you would always remain master of the Egerton estates."

His hearer did not tell, as Farquhar had well known it would. The one fear of Mr. Egerton—the fear for the last few years had been that as time would come when he should be forced to leave his old home, and see it in the hands of strangers, and the horror of this haunted him night and day.

He knew that Farquhar had the power to foreclose at any moment, and that no motives of kindness would prevent his doing so; he knew that it would be to his advantage. But there was a way of escape—a solution of all his difficulties—if only Nathalie would consent!

He drew a long, deep breath. The relief of knowing that so long as he lived he would be free from the money troubles that had hitherto tormented him was in itself a most powerful consideration; but there was another and equally potent motive for acquiescing in Farquhar's proposal—the fact that his son would never know from his lips of the mad folly of which he had been guilty—that so long as he lived he would continue to enjoy the esteem and respect with which the representatives of his family had always been regarded.

The temptation was a great one, and it conquered him.

"I do not see why, on these conditions, you should not marry my daughter," he said, slowly. "I will lay your proposal before her, and hear what she says."

Of Nathalie's enthusiastic and romantic temperament he thought little; of the bright visions of girlhood, of the grand ideas she had formed, and the sweet fancies she had woven round them, he did not stay to consider. His salvation was in his daughter's hands, and surely she would not hesitate in the sacrifice of her feelings in order to secure it!

## CHAPTER V.

WHEN she left the school in the quiet Brussels Rue, and placed herself under the charge of her father's old friend, an entirely new life opened its portals to Adrienne Marchmont, and, for the first time in many years,



she knew what it was to have someone caring for and tending her.

Sir Ralph engaged a French maid, who was at first rather a terror to the young girl, for she had been accustomed from her earliest youth to waiting on herself, and was very reluctant to depart from her old habits. But after a little while, and when she found it pleased the baronet that she should be tended like any other lady of position, she yielded a graceful submission to his wishes.

Sir Ralph had a villa on the borders of the Mediterranean, and there he took his young charge, and placed her under the care of the housekeeper, who was the widow of a curate she had once known, and another recipient of his bounty. From thence they took excursions to places of interest in the vicinity, and Adrienne's life became a dream of placid content, whose one object was to minister to the baronet's happiness.

Her gratitude towards him was almost exaggerated in its intensity, and her great regret was that she would never be able to requite it. True, she did her best—she read to him, played to him, sang all her pretty little French ditties and dreamy German melodies, and was ever ready to accompany him in his walks or drives; but she felt all this a very small return for his having rescued her from the drudgery of an unpaid governess-ship, which must otherwise have been her destiny.

And so the days passed on, and it became time to think of returning home, for Sir Ralph was, above all things, a most conscientious landlord, and unwilling to entrust the care of his estate to anyone save himself.

"How do you think you will like being in England?" he asked Adrienne one morning, as they sat together in the sunny garden, with its orange and olive trees and luxuriance of brightly-tinted flowers.

Her face clouded over so little, and the baronet at once noticed it.

"You don't seem to welcome the idea," he said, taking her hand and stroking it softly, as it lay on his broad palm. "Tell me what caused your change of expression just then?"

She turned to him with her frank, trustful smile, and answered, candidly,—

"I have no doubt I shall like it when I get there, but the thought of going amongst entire strangers rather appalled me for the moment. Here I have learned to feel quite at home."

"And so you will at Lynwood after a few days."

She looked slightly incredulous. "Perhaps—and yet—" she broke off abruptly, was thoughtful for a few moments, and then continued in a different tone, "I have been thinking of your great kindness to me, and it has struck me—forgive me for saying so—that perhaps your relatives may imagine I have no right to it, and may be inclined to resent a penniless girl, who, but for you, would have had no other resource than to earn her own living, taking up her abode in your house, and being treated with as much consideration as you treat me. Allow me to continue," she interpolated, rapidly, as he would have interrupted her. "I will not trespass on your patience long, but I wish to say this. If you will allow me to take up a recognised position in your household as secretary, or amanuensis, or even assistant housekeeper, and give me a small salary that will enable me to buy my clothes, I shall be more than satisfied; and I shall feel then that I am not receiving a lavish bounty that I am powerless to return. I hope I have not offended you?" she added, anxiously.

"I do not think you could offend me if you tried ever so hard"—smiling.

"I am glad," drawing a breath of relief. "I would not displease you for all the world; but it seemed to me better to speak out frankly what was in my heart."

"It was better—it will always be better that you should tell me your thoughts," he answered, with a grave smile. "You are not

tired of me, Adrienne? You do not want to leave me?"

"No, no—a thousand times no!"

"I make you happy?"

"You make me happier than I have ever been before."

"And there is no one else you would rather be with?"

"Certainly not," she responded, looking surprised; then she added, with naive simplicity, "there is no one in the world I care so much for as I do for you!"

He bent down and kissed her forehead, then rose and left her without any explanation. There was a grove of olive-trees on one side of the house, and Sir Ralph was very fond of wandering between the silvery foliage when he wished to be alone, as he did now; so thither he bent his steps, and walked backwards and forwards, his arms behind his back, and his eyes downcast.

He was absorbed in thought, for Adrienne's innocent words had roused a train of reflections that were not altogether pleasant.

He could see quite clearly that her position in his house would be an anomaly, unless, indeed, he formally adopted her, which he had an instinctive repugnance to doing.

While he imagined she was a child, his self-imposed guardianship had seemed a very easy task, for it would have been the simplest thing in the world to take her home and get a governess to attend to her education; but her age and womanly appearance complicated matters very considerably, and he had more than once speculated on the amount of gossip her advent at Lynwood Hall would be sure to provoke.

However much he might strive he would not be able to protect her from comment and curiosity, and he knew her sensitive nature well enough to be aware how deeply she would feel any slight or humiliation that might be put upon her.

"It is not the men but the women who will attack her," he muttered, as he paced in the shadow of the grey olive-leaves. "If she were a determined, strong-minded woman of the Girtton type, I could leave her to fight her own battles, confident that she would eventually triumph, but she is such a delicate creature—one of those fragile flowers that the least breath of unkindness would wither. She would be much better off if she were married to some good, kind man who would take care of her."

The idea took a strong hold on him, for it seemed to offer the best solution of his difficulty; but then came the question of how he would like to part with her, and he grew conscious of a curious heart-sinking, which sufficiently answered it.

As a matter of fact she had, even in this short time, established such an influence over him, and become, as it were, so thoroughly a part of his life, that he could not bear to think of a possible separation.

Without her existence would return to its former level of dead monotony. He would miss her every hour of the day—miss her sweet face in the morning when she went out with him, in the afternoon when she read to him, in the evening when she sang her pretty ballads for his pleasure. No, her society had become a necessity, and he could not bear to contemplate a future that deprived him of it.

"Marry her yourself!"

He actually started at the suggestion, and then stood perfectly still, debating it.

Why not?

Mon of his age often married young women. And after all, he was not so very old—only fifty-five. True, there is a difference between fifty-five and eighteen, but the man should always be older than the woman, and he would be better able to take care of her than a boy of twenty-one. Honestly he thought he could make her happy. If he had imagined otherwise he would have put the temptation from him, and resigned himself to her loss; for, although, it may be, blinded in this case by

his own inclinations, he was essentially thoughtful and considerate of the welfare of those depending on him, and would infinitely rather have sacrificed himself than his young charge.

For the first time in many years the idea of marrying commended itself to him, and he found his emotions strangely stirred by the reflection that, perhaps, after all, he might see his own son heir of Lynwood. With this there came another, and a much less pleasurable one—namely, that of Otho Lynwood.

What would his nephew, who had been taught to look upon himself as heir to the title and estates, say when he saw his heritage thus threatened?

"He will have no just cause of complaint," argued the Baronet. "I have done a great deal for him in the past, and in any event I should provide for him generously. There is no reason why I should sacrifice my own happiness for the sake of my step-brother's son, and surely he will be reasonable enough to acknowledge this, and take the matter quietly. But I must not count on events that have not yet happened. First of all I must speak to Adrienne, and hear what she says."

He believed in striking while the iron was hot, and, perhaps, he thought, too, that if he waited his resolution and courage might fail, for it requires a certain amount of both when making an offer to a girl nearly forty years one's junior.

He found her sitting where he had left her—amongst the roses and passion-flowers. Her hands, and the book they held, had fallen on her lap, and her dreamy eyes were fixed on the blue waters, flashing like diamonds in the sunlight.

Her thoughts were away in Brussels, and she was recalling the last day she spent at school, when he whom she had christened Lancelot had walked by her side.

To say that she had fallen in love with him would be to say too much, for, poetical and imaginative as she was, her romantic tendencies would hardly have carried her thus far at a first interview; but it is certain he had interested her very greatly, and it was not at all likely she would readily forget him.

She roused herself, and looked up with a bright smile as Sir Ralph approached, and he resumed his former seat beside her.

"I have been thinking over what you said, Adrienne," he commenced, slowly, for what he wished to tell her could not be told rapidly, "and I have come to the conclusion there is a great deal of sense in your remarks. Your position at Lynwood Hall might not be so pleasant as it has been here, but for you to go there in any such capacity as companion or housekeeper is not to be thought of. Your father was a gentleman, and I certainly do not wish you to take a descent in the social scale. This being so, only one course commends itself to me, and that is to take you back as my wife."

It was not a very graceful way of putting it, but Sir Ralph was too much in earnest to look about for flowery language, even if he had been in the habit—which he was not—of indulging in it on ordinary occasions, and Adrienne, for her part, was too greatly astonished at the meaning of the words to think of anything else.

It took her a few minutes to make sure that she had perfectly understood him; then a deep blush rose to her cheeks, and she looked away towards the blue waters, while the hands lying on her lap began to tremble.

"My dear," said the Baronet, noting these signs, and hardly knowing in what way to interpret them—for his acquaintance with feminine nature was extremely limited—"do not let what I have said distress you. Believe me I have your welfare at heart, and if you think you would not be happy married to me say so at once, and I will dismiss the idea from my mind altogether."

"It is not that!" she exclaimed, hastily, as

if fearful of wounding him. "Do you really mean you wish me to be your wife?"

"I do wish it, with all my heart, and yet, not unless you think you could care for me. I know quite well I am old enough to be your father, but all the same, I am young enough to look after you, and study your happiness, which, I need not say, would be the one great object of my life."

"I am sure of it."

"Mind, I do not wish to force your inclinations in any way, and if you refuse me, our relative positions will be exactly the same as they have hitherto been. I confess you have grown very dear to me, Adrienne, so dear that the thought of parting from you would fill me with pain."

"And you think I could make you happy if I married you?" she asked, very gently.

"I do not think, I know you could; but the question to be considered is not so much my welfare as your own. Let me ask you one thing—do you care for anyone else?"

She shook her head in quick negation.

"For whom could I care? You forget I have seen so few men in my life."

He drew a breath of relief, well pleased at the answer. The question, he told himself, had been an absurd one, but all the same he was glad she had replied to it so readily.

"If you would like time to consider my offer, pray take it," he continued. "I do not wish to press you in any way."

Probably she did not hear this last remark, for her thoughts were very busy with the problem just presented to her. Of love she knew nothing at all, but she had not been free from those visions that come to all young girls—visions of a hero, who in due time, should come and claim her heart.

Dreamy, indistinct, impalpable as they were, they had yet been very sweet, and she relinquished them with a sigh.

It seemed to her her duty was very clear. Sir Ralph showed her a way of paying the debt she owed him, and surely it would be base ingratitude on her part if she refused! Should she, in return for his goodness, bring sorrow on her benefactor? No! a thousand times no!

She turned to him, and put both hands in his.

"I will marry you, Sir Ralph," she said, simply, although a cloud of wistful tears came in her eyes as she spoke the words; "and, indeed I will do my best to make you a good wife."

Alas, poor Adrienne! Love is not a gift to be bought, or to be kept away by strong endeavour, and only the dread future can teach thee that there lies a great gulf between thee and thy husband, which love can never span!

## CHAPTER VI.

THE chambers occupied by Captain Lynwood were in Piccadilly, and were as luxurious as money and good taste could make them. The officer was a sybarite, who liked purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, quite regardless of the debts such expensive habits could not fail to involve him in, and serenely confident of the future that would rid him of all his entanglements.

He was rather popular in society, partly because of his handsome appearance and polished manners, and partly because of the position it was generally supposed he would occupy on his uncle's death.

Mothers, with marriageable daughters, thought him a charming man, and invited him to all their gatherings, while the daughters themselves vied with each other in striving to gain his attentions, and declared that if Byron had lived in these days he would assuredly have sketched him as the hero of a poem!

He was, in his way, accomplished—that is to say, he could dance well, ride well, fence well, and was the possessor of a musical tenor voice, with whose exercise he, on occasion, delighted his friends.

As might have been expected from a man who seldom went to bed before dawn, he rarely got up until noon, and then it was to loll in an armchair, clothed in dressing-gown and slippers, and glance over his letters while he sipped his chocolate.

About a fortnight after Sir Ralph had asked Adrienne Marchmont to marry him, Captain Lynwood found a letter from his uncle on the breakfast-table, and was just proceeding to open it when the sound of voices, raised in angry altercation, made him pause.

He lifted his head and listened, while a muttered curse escaped his lips, and, a minute later, the door of the sitting-room was pushed open, and a short, dark man, of a Jewish cast of face, entered, followed by Steedman, the officer's valet.

"I could not help it, sir," exclaimed the latter, in self-justification, "I told him you were out, but he would come in!"

"Of course he would, you fool!" said the person referred to, with a contemptuous laugh; "he has not lived all these years without learning the tricks his clients are up to when their little bills become due. Oh! no; oh! no."

He rubbed his dirty hands together, and laughed again, while his quick eyes flashed a rapid glance round the room, noting the various costly knick-knacks scattered about, and mentally appraising their value.

"All right, Steedman," observed the officer, waving his hand, a sign of dismissal the valet was glad enough to obey, for he had had some experience of Captain Lynwood's temper when he was put out, and did not care to risk a repetition.

"Sit down, Hyam," continued the young man, trying to look and speak unconcernedly; "this visit of yours is an unexpected pleasure!"

The guest grinned.

"Unexpected, and a pleasure, is it? Well, you surprise me, Mr. Lynwood, you do indeed, sir. Judging from your face as I came in I should have said it was neither the one nor the other."

"You are facetious," remarked Otho, laughing rather awkwardly, "I suppose you think you have the best of the situation, and make the most of it, while I am under the obligation of being your debtor."

"It's an obligation you can be released from as soon as you like, sir. The bill's due this day, and I shall be delighted to give you a receipt for the money."

"No doubt you would, my good fellow, but it so happens that it is not convenient for me to give you the money, and as a consequence you'll have to wait for it."

The Jew shook his head.

"Impossible, sir, quite impossible! I have a very heavy account to meet to-morrow, and unless you pay me I shall be ruined—ruined!"

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Lynwood, angrily. "Don't come any more of those infernal lies on me. Unfortunately, I've had too many dealings with you and your tribe not to know exactly what they mean."

"It's the truth, sir, I give you my word it is. I'm a poor man, Mr. Lynwood, and I want to see my money again!"

"Your money's safe—you know that well enough."

"Yes, sir, that may be, but these are very hard times, and unless one looks after oneself one doesn't stand a very good chance with all the swindlers there are about."

"What do you mean?" demanded the officer, angrily, and he looked so fierce, as he half started from his seat, that the Hebrew involuntarily drew his chair a few paces farther away.

"Nothing, sir, nothing—what should I mean? Only, you know, you've had the money for some time, and I like turning it over."

"Well, I pay you fifty per cent.; what the devil more do you want?"

Mr. Hyam shrugged his shoulders.

"Fifty per cent. is not so very much. I have

clients who pay me sixty, and even a hundred."

"Then you are devilish lucky to have got hold of such fools—that's all I have to say," responded Lynwood, with a slight laugh, and proceeding to light a cigarette as he spoke. "Why, there's money to be had at five per cent."

"Not on personal security, sir, not on personal security! Recollect, I have nothing but your signature for the money."

"And my signature's as safe as the Bank of England; you know that well enough."

A dubious cough did not exactly assent to this proposition.

"It may be, sir; but all the same, I'd rather have the Bank. There's a good deal of your paper flying about the market."

Lynwood did not reply. A denial would have served him in little stead with this man, who knew as much of his pecuniary difficulties as he knew himself.

"And the fact is," pursued the Jew, watching him keenly, "your bills in future won't be so easily discounted unless they are backed by a substantial name."

"Now, look here, Hyam—that is all nonsense!" exclaimed Otho, throwing down his cigarette, and speaking rather quickly, "I know quite well that my name, taken on its own merits, is not worth much, but as it is substantially the name of Sir Ralph Lynwood, it is as good as the Prime Minister's. I am his heir, and in the course of a few years shall be one of the richest baronets in England."

"Sir Ralph is not so very old—only fifty-five," demurred the money-lender; "besides, I understand he is a healthy man."

"Nothing of the sort," was the unblushing reply. "He has heart disease of long standing, and the doctors have told me, privately, that he can't possibly last very long, in spite of his hale appearance. He may drop down dead any moment."

"Heart disease is a very uncertain thing. It hangs about people for fifty years sometimes, and then lets something else kill them at last," observed Hyam, sentimentally, and with a mournful shake of the head.

"Don't talk nonsense. In the ordinary course of events I shall succeed to the estates before very long, and then, you may depend upon it, I shan't hesitate to rid myself of such an old-man-of-the-sea as you have proved."

"Must look after my own interests, sir. Poor men like me have to live as well as our betters. Suppose," he added, as if struck by a sudden thought—"suppose your uncle should marry?"

"Suppose the moon should fall in my lap as I sit here?" laughed the Captain. "One event is about as likely as the other. I have Sir Ralph's promise that he won't marry, so you may set your mind at ease on that score."

"And what about your own marriage, sir?"

"Ah, that is a much more probable contingency, and one which may occur at any time."

"So it is true that you are engaged to Miss Farquhar, the great heiress?"

The officer pulled out the ends of his long moustache, and smiled.

"You are downright in your questions, Hyam."

"I have a downright reason, sir."

"Well, then, as a secret, I don't mind telling you that there is something in that quarter—in point of fact, I can't tell you how soon I may become a Benedict!"

"She is very rich, ain't she?"

"Oh, enormously!"

"You are a lucky man, captain."

"Yes, I have every reason to believe so."

"And a nice girl into the bargain. I've seen her driving about in the Park with her pair of greys. You didn't think I frequented the Park, did you, captain?"

Lynwood raised his eyebrows by way of protesting against ever having bestowed a thought on the habits and customs of Mr. Phineas Hyam.

"But I do," continued that worthy, with a



chuckle. "I find it pays, for I contrive to discover in what way my clients are treated by the 'swells,' and I act according."

The officer glanced at the gilt and china clock on the mantelpiece, and pulled his watch from his pocket rather ostentatiously, as if he wished the movement to be noticed.

"I'm sorry to hurry you away, but I have an appointment at two o'clock, and it's after one now. Let us settle our business and have done with it."

"Certainly, sir," responded Hyam, with alacrity, and producing his pocket-book. "You are going to pay me—"

"I am going to do nothing of the sort, as you know very well! You must renew the bill, and as soon as I'm married I will take it up."

After some squabbling the matter ended as Lynwood had foreseen it would—that is, the bill was renewed at an increased rate of interest, and when these arrangements were settled Mr. Hyam took leave.

Otho breathed a sigh of relief as he went out.

"Thank Heaven, I'm rid of him!—at least, for a time!" he muttered.

What he purposed doing in the future he did not pause to consider. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" was a motto he was very fond of quoting, and whose philosophy he practised.

So long as he could get money advanced to him—so long as he was regarded as a future baronet, and was flattered and caressed by society—he was satisfied. Afterwards—well, Sir Ralph would die, or he would make a rich marriage—something would happen to set matters straight, he had no doubt; and as for the exorbitant interest he paid for the loans advanced him it must all come out of the estate, which was extensive enough to bear a good deal of draining.

He was getting up in order to proceed to his dressing-room when his eyes fell on his uncle's letter that he had been on the point of opening when Hyam came in.

He took it up carelessly enough, and broke the seal, while, as a matter of fact, his thoughts were absorbed in other things; but after he had read a few lines his attention was effectually enchained, and in his excitement he started from his seat, his face growing deadly pale, his eyes almost starting from his head.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed aloud, his breath coming very fast. "I must have made some mistake. My uncle married! Oh, no, it cannot be, it cannot be!"

But there it was, in black and white, and in Sir Ralph's own handwriting. No mistake, no deception, but the actual announcement of the fact that the day before the baronet had made Adrienne Marchmont his wife.

The rage and despair of Otho Lynwood were unbounded—indescribable. At one blow the fabric of future wealth and prosperity that he had raised was dashed to the ground, and he saw himself a beggar—nay, worse, a man involved in debt that he had not the faintest hope of ever being able to pay; for the baronet, although generous, was a just man, and abominated extravagance—assuredly he would not settle the claims of the Jewish usurers, in whose hands his nephew had placed himself.

What would society have to say to him now?—now that he was virtually disinherited; for of course Sir Ralph would have children of his own, who would take the place that he had fondly imagined would be his.

He clenched his hands together till the nails drew blood, and ground his heel into the carpet as viciously as if he were crushing the life out of an enemy.

"Ten thousand curses on him and her!" he muttered, between his set teeth; then an evil light came in his eyes. "The game is not over yet, Lady Lynwood! You have played your cards well, and secured the first trick; but it will go hard with me if I don't cheekmate you even yet; at least, I'll have a good try for it!"

Poor innocent Adrienne! Already she had

made a foe who would pursue her relentlessly to the end—who would strike mercilessly when he got her into his power.

(To be continued.)

## TWO MARRIAGES.

—O—

### CHAPTER XLIV.—(continued).

He was still in his scarlet hunting-coat and top-boots, exactly as Georgie had seen him many and many a time before. But the one sleeve of his coat was torn and muddy. There was a scratch on his forehead that bled a little.

He did not seem to be the least bit surprised to see Sister Octavia—he did not take any notice of her, but said to the doctor, immediately,—

"I'm glad you've got a nurse. Can you manage to do something for him now? It's his ribs, you see—at least, I'm afraid so."

The doctor and Georgie, with the help of Colonel Trevor's valet, were able to afford the patient considerable relief after a time; but although Sister Octavia's fingers were as clever and as neat and as gentle as ever, her face was as white as the counterpane and had a hard, rigid look.

After about half-an-hour the patient was declared to be pretty comfortable, and the bulletin went forth below that it was not nearly so bad as was at first thought. Two fractured ribs and a few bruises. Nothing dangerous!

"And now for you, sir," said the Doctor to Gilbert, cheerfully. "Let me have a look at your arm."

"Oh, my arm's nothing—it's nothing but a sprain; but I've out my wrist rather badly," showing where he had made a kind of tourniquet of his handkerchief.

"We will soon see to that. Sister Octavia, help him off with his coat. She is sure to do it easier than you or me."

And Sister Octavia, without a word, complied; but it was no very easy nor very quick job.

First the good arm was pulled out, then the sling removed, then very, very gently the other arm. But as the sleeve passed over the wrist the handkerchief became disarranged, and the bleeding burst out afresh.

At this Sister Octavia shook all over, and looked as if she was going to faint, while the doctor, noticing it, said,—

"Run down to the hall and bring me my little case; this will have to be sewn up. I can't keep, as he spoke, his thumb on the bleeding, 'make out what has come to that young lady this morning. She looked as if she was going to faint before she ever came into the room, and you saw her yourself just now. I can't make it out. She—you would scarcely believe the nerves she has, and the cases she has attended, with the coolness and skill—I will say it—of a professional surgeon. I am all against lady doctors, but as nurses—skilled nurses like her—they have no equal. I can't make out what has come over her. Why this to-night is nothing; and as to your wrist, it's only a deep, rather nasty cut. Ah, here she comes!"

"Sister Octavia, you are not yourself to-night. I doubt if you should have come. You won't be able to do this, eh?"

"Oh yes, thank you, Dr. MacLaine! I'm quite well now—I'll do it," threading as she spoke a surgical needle with silk thread.

"Please sit down," to Gilbert. "I can do it best kneeling," now quite as cool as the doctor himself.

She had had a good battle with her emotions on the stairs, and strangled them.

"You just keep the two edges together quite evenly, doctor"; and to the patient, "I won't hurt you much; it's not as bad as it looks."

She calmly proceeded to stitch the wound very rapidly and skilfully together. In two

minutes it was all over; she was standing up, not once looking at Gilbert.

"Do not go yet," she said, unrolling a bandage, which in another instant she began to bind firmly round his wrist. "As to the sprain of his forearm I leave that to you, Dr. MacLaine; but I think it is nothing—a little arnica?"

"Yes, arnica, and rest, and the sling; and you know what to do about Colonel Trevor; he is to have that sleeping draught at half-past nine. You understand? As to this gentleman, Mr. Vernon, he can go home and have his dinner as usual. I'm off now," beginning to fuss about and collect his things. "I've another case of importance to see before my dinner. I'll look in to-morrow morning. I'm leaving the patient in capital hands; she's all right now," lowering his voice a little. "As—as for your arm, sir, you'll see it will be well before you are twice married!"

And with this parting jest he opened the door, and took his departure, leaving the nurse alone with the two patients.

She began to put away her implements into their case, to roll up lint, and to make a feint of being exceedingly busy.

Gilbert stood and looked at her for a moment, and then, picking up his coat, followed the doctor's example, and left the room.

It was but little after seven o'clock; and when Georgie had settled the sick man's room to her fancy she came and lowered her light, and sat down near him on a low chair, thinking that he was asleep.

But he was not, although his eyes were closed. After a while he opened them, and watched her closely as she sat there near the bottom of the bed in her white cap, white collar, and cuffs, and apron.

She was resting her head on her hand; her gaze was bent on the floor. Of what was she thinking?

For quite five minutes he watched her undisturbed. At last he said,—

"Sister Octavia!" and she started up, and turned her face towards him interrogatively.

"Sister Octavia, I'm glad you are here. I'm much obliged to you for all you did for me just now. There is nothing like a woman about one when one is ill.

'When pain and sickness wring the brow—  
A ministering angel thou.'

Sister Octavia stared! The patient who can quote Sir Walter Scott is not likely to be very long a patient. There's another bit, though," he proceeded. "The line before that—do you remember it? I think it says,—

'Uncertain—coy and hard to please.'

That fits you, too, Mrs. Vernon!"

Georgie again started visibly.

"You see," he proceeded quietly, "I know all about you—he told me. I never was more astonished in the course of a not uneventful life!"

Here ensued a considerable silence, and then Colonel Trevor went on,—

"I'm taking the liberty of speaking to you, not as Sister Octavia, but as the wife of a fellow I've known since he was the height of a walking-stick, and a rare good chap, too—not many like him; and, bless my heart! am I not godfather to one of your own boys?"

"Yes," she said, not looking at him, but nervously pulling the strings of her apron; "to Jack."

"Yes, my namesake, ma'am, and probably my heir. But I'm truly grieved to hear that you care so very little about your children. You must be a queer young woman!"

"Who says so?" she asked, in a low voice, turning her eyes on his.

"I say so," impressively. "I say so, when I hear that you are impelled to go back to them, and your very excellent husband, and you tell him that you have adopted all the sick and blind and halt instead, and won't have anything to say to them or him. You leave other duties, forsooth! You forsake your

own flesh and blood for strangers! Why you are worse than a heathen, ma'am! Charity begins at home. I'm uncommonly glad now that I never married, when I see how precious miserable a woman can make a fellow, as you have made Gilbert!"

Sister Octavia tried to speak, but she had no chance whatever.

"Don't argue. You know I'm right. Your tongue may deny it, but your own heart is, I daresay, truthful. No, don't argue, you know as my nurse that I'm not to be excited, nor contradicted. Here, give me your hand. It's my left, and promise me you'll go and make it up with Gilbert. There's the going, go down to dinner."

"I don't want any," she said, shaking her head.

"Nonsense! Do as I tell you, or I won't do as you tell me. I won't go. Go, who is to war, I'd like to know, eh? Not that fellow with his arm in a sling. Go this moment, and don't keep the soup congealing, and send my valet here; I'll have some. I'll not starve!"

Georgie felt very reluctant to enter the dining-room. But two places were laid at a small, round table, and Gilbert, who had doffed his hunting things and got himself into his evening clothes, was waiting with his back to the fire.

As she came into the room he went and seated himself at one side of the table, but he never spoke to her, and busied himself in trying to eat soup with his left hand.

How extraordinary it seemed to her, sitting opposite to him once more after those long years, and, to all appearances, perfect strangers!

After soup came fish, after meat an *entrée*, easily managed as helped. Then a small joint; this Georgie carved, and said to her *vis-à-vis*—

"Shall I give you some?"

"Thanks, if you will be so kind."

She carved abominably, as he knew once upon a time, but she had improved. She not only carved, but cut up his meat for him, and handed it to the waiting footman, who thought that it was very queer Mr. Vernon never spoke to the Sister. He thought it still queerer when at last he said to her—

"I see you drink nothing. Will you have some wine? Here's claret, hock, sherry," looking round as he spoke.

"No thank you, but I should like some water."

"Water there was none."

"John," he said, "some water. No," as John approached, "not for me, for"—with a movement of his head—"Mrs. Vernon."

John thought it must be some mistake. Mrs. Vernon he had said, but there was no one present but Sister Octavia, and *faut de mieux* he went and poured it into her tumbler.

"It's going to freeze again," said the gentleman who was resolved to break her in somehow.

"Yes, I daresay," she replied, almost inwardly.

Sister Octavia was evidently not used to dining alone with good-looking young men. She was as timid as a hare.

"We had a narrow shave this evening," he went on.

"Yes, you must have had. A runaway," shuddering.

"You had better let me give you a glass of wine; you really look as if you wanted something of that sort," he said, looking over at her pale face—pale to the lips.

"No thank you. I never touch it."

"Against the rules, I suppose?" carelessly.

"No; it is a mere matter of individual choice."

And there was another silence, whilst the servants put the dessert on the table and then quitted the room.

Immediately afterwards Sister Octavia rose to go also, but she was forced to sit down again; the faint feeling she had experienced that evening before came over her. And she

sat down and seized the table with both her hands, and felt as if the whole room was slipping away from her.

Gilbert sprang up, poured out a glass of port with his left hand and said, authoritatively, as he held it to her livid lips,—

"Here, drink this at once, and without a word."

And she did and was better, and was thinking of making her escape, but she could not, and was obliged to take his arm—his sound one—and accept a seat in an easy arm-chair near the fire. Then he handed her a screen, remarking as he did so, that no ring of any sort or kind adorned her fingers, much less his.

"Are you often liable to these attacks?" he said, at last.

"No; never, I may say, but—" and she stopped.

"You were about to say something?"

"Yes," standing up, and resting her hand against the mantelpiece; "I thought when I heard of the accident—the coachman said it was a bad one—I," and she stopped for a moment, as if something was choking her, "I—I thought it was you, Gilbert."

"Really; but you scarcely imagine that I am so conceited as to attribute your sudden attack of faintness to anxiety of mind on my behalf. I am, to quote your own words, now outside your life altogether."

"But you are not," she returned, vehemently. "I see it now. I was mad, foolish, wicked to say so. This fright I have had this evening—see me, look at me?" holding out her trembling hands, "has shown me that you never can be outside of my life—that you are part of it as long as I live. The suspense I endured this evening," now placing her hands upon her heart, "nearly killed me!"

"Trevor has been talking to you, and telling you to say all this," said her husband, scornfully. "He is a good old chap."

"He has; but do you know me so little that you think I would be led by him, a stranger? No, Gilbert, I am obeying the dictates of my own heart. Forgive me, as I forgive you, and take me home."

Here she broke down completely, and, burying her face in her hands, wept aloud.

Needless to say, she did not appeal in vain.

A very short time afterwards they went upstairs to the invalid's room, ostensibly to give him his sleeping draught, but Sister Octavia looked different somehow, and she had dispensed with her white cap.

"Hullo, Sister Octavia," said Colonel Trevor, "how is this? What has become of your head gear?"

"I'm not Sister Octavia any longer," she said, colouring, as she held out the glass, "I'm Georgie Vernon; and as to my cap, my poor cap, he took off my head, and threw it into the fire."

"Well, I must say you look better without it. But what is one man's gain is another man's loss. What's to become of the hospital? How will they do without Sister Octavia? and, pray, who is to nurse me?"

"The hospital will be made amends to in other ways. He says that wretched fortune of mine that has caused all the mischief most of it may go there. As for you, I am going to nurse you just as well without my cap as with it. I am not going home till you are about again, and able to come with me," glancing at Gilbert, as if to desire him at once to endorse this invitation. "If you are a good patient we will be able to travel on Christmas Eve."

He was a good patient, and Christmas Day found them all at the Manor.

Who shall describe the delight of Alix and Jack, and Mr. Lumsden, and, indeed, of the whole household to behold the long-missing master and mistress back again under their own roof, "never, never," as she assured the boys, very fervently, "to go away ever any more," nor the amazement of the neighbours to see Mrs. Vernon in church on Christmas

morning, looking brighter, and prettier, and happier than ever.

A proud man was Gilbert as he placed a new wedding-ring and diamond guard on Georgie's finger, and said,—

"Here is my Christmas-box, darling. It's not necessary, I know, a new ring, but it's a fancy on my part, and it is an untold satisfaction to me to know that you never were any one else's wife but mine, in spite of all that we have gone through, together and separately, on account of the two marriages!"

One word in conclusion about a few of the other people in the story.

Binks is head housemaid at the Manor, and sometimes forgets herself, and addresses her mistress as "Mrs. George."

She shakes her head, and likes people to believe that she knows a great deal more than the rest of the world.

She bids fair to become an old family servant, as she declares it was the best day of her life she ever took service with Mrs. Vernon, and she will never leave unless she is put outside the door by main force; but it is not unlikely that she will tend an ear some day to the second coachman.

And Maggie is in the kitchen, an excellent, hard-working servant.

The family keep a good deal of company. Colonel Trevor is a standing dish, and devoted to Mrs. Vernon—or Sister Octavia, as he sometimes calls her in fun.

Lady Fanny has been down, and paid a state visit, and prided about, and asked her aristocratic old nurse everywhere, but there is no little tiny skeleton of any sort to be seen.

It is evident that Georgie and Gilbert have not a secret between them; that they are as happy as the day is long; and that old lady has to bring back these heavy tidings to her niece in London, Miss Lizzie Fane, who has not been among the bidden guests.

"No, Gilbert," said Georgie, with her hands on his shoulders. "There it will be firm. I never can forgive—no, I won't say that I never can forget her treachery. She shall never come into my house. Why should I ask a person I don't want to come? You wicked man! do you want me to be a hypocrite?"

"No, no! Perhaps, Georgie, you are right!"

"Perhaps? Of course I am right. Oh, Gilbert, if she came down here I know she would set her cap at the Colonel, and marry him willy nilly."

"The Colonel is not a man to be married off and, my dear, against his will."

"Well, maybe not; and any way, he says he is going to stay single till he finds someone like me. He can never do that, can he? Come, be quick, and say something else," looking at him steadily.

"Say he upbids you. Will that do?"

"Gilbert," pinching him, "tell me something honestly. Did not Lizzie say her best to—o marry you, not so very long ago? I was told she did," she added, significantly.

"You should not believe all you hear, you know," colouring at the remembrance of a certain interview.

"Oh, well, I won't tease you any more. You have answered my question."

"How?" indignantly.

"Never you mind. I am going to the station now to fetch Sister Katherine. I have ordered the omnibus, as I have promised to take the boys. Their legs are getting so long and so carefully in the way in the brougham when there are four."

"You can't stir a yard without three boys," he said, with a smile. "Well, as there's no off chance of Crosby coming by the same train, let me too. Trevor and I will go on the box, and one of us will coach you."

"Yes; but, Gilbert, dear," very earnestly, "he is not to drive, especially the eldest—nephew."

"And why not, you goose?"

"Because he is always upsetting himself



and other people. He confesses it, he glories in it! You know it's not three months since he broke his ribs, and very nearly your neck into the bargain."

"I know; I'm not very likely to forget that in a hurry. I believe in my heart, Georgie, that I have to thank that very accident for having you here to-day."

To this Mrs. Vernon says something that sounds like the word "nonsense," and that she would have been there anyhow; and, putting her arm in his, she leads him out of the room as a distant noise of clamping, stamping on gravel, and wheels, and a couple of children's voices is suddenly heard through an open door, and thus Gilbert and Georgie pass out of sight!

[THE END.]

## SINNED AGAINST.

### CHAPTER XIII.—(continued).

THE difficulty was to find her. He had but one thought, one idea, that she had returned to Park-lane, and taken refuge with her cousin.

He left a hasty message for his mother, got into a cab, and drove to the house where he had wooed his bride.

"Can I see Lord St. John?"

Probably the last person Stuart expected to see was the man who, when they last met, had spurned his hand.

"This is an unanticipated pleasure!" he began, stiffly, but Sir Clarence interrupted him.

"Don't speak like that—this is not a mere formal visit. I am here on a matter of life or death. Lord St. John, where is my wife?"

St. John's face changed.

"Your wife!"

"Yes; is she here?" his voice faltered. "You may think I have behaved badly to her, I know you have little cause to think otherwise, but indeed in one thing you are mistaken. Alix St. John was my life's love, and I would not annul my marriage with her even if I could."

"But why do you come to me? You must know I have no influence with Lady Manners?"

"Is not Alix here? Hasn't she been here?"

"She was here this morning for more than an hour. When I think of the change in her, and her sad face and heart-broken expression, I find it hard to answer you civilly."

Sir Clarence clutched at his arm as a drowning man at some friendly rope.

"St. John, things are going hard with me; you must help me yourself for her sake."

Stuart looked bewildered.

"Alix came to me this morning for her sister's address. I gave it her; nay, more, I escorted her there—that is all I know of her movements."

Sir Clarence staggered. He knew Alix had returned from that interview, but he could not tell whether it had been such as to induce her to throw herself on her sister's protection.

"The whole world will know it soon," he said, hoarsely, "but I will tell you first—my wife has left me, Lord St. John."

"Left you!"

"Aye, and, as she says, for ever!"

"I can't believe it."

"And do you think it easy for me to believe it either?"

"She loved you so. I should have said her whole heart was wrapped up in you. I know her only object in seeing Miss St. John was to appeal to her to restore to you even a fragment of her father's wealth."

"Aye," said Clarence, eagerly, "it is all true—she loved me, but she has left me."

"But where could she go?"

"My mother," Sir Clarence felt his face flush hotly, "is not a tender-hearted woman; she made my poor little wife realize the

difference this loss of money made to us now."

"Did you make her realise it too?"

"I never meant to"—and he hesitated—"I was obliged to humour my mother a little just to make things go smoothly."

"Alix told me you were going abroad, and she was to be left behind."

"I never really thought of such a thing. I expect a diplomatic appointment shortly at Brussels. I have an uncle there high in diplomacy; his wife is a great contrast to my mother, and I know that she would have treated Alix as a daughter."

He was speaking of Alix in the past tense, it came home to Stuart with a pang.

"You are keeping something back," he said, stiffly; "if I am to help you I must know everything."

And Sir Clarence told him. Bit by bit he poured out his miserable story. Stuart felt less indignant with him as he listened—he had been rash rather than wicked, careless rather than cruel, after all.

"What is your opinion?" asked Sir Clarence, when he had finished.

"Of what?"

His thoughts were occupied pretty much just then with the Dowager Lady Manners—he was thinking how thoroughly he should enjoy ducking her in a mill-pond or executing some other summary punishment on her. What a pity there was no customary way of wreaking vengeance on elderly ladies for such wrongs as she had heaped on Alix! Perhaps, after all, though it is in the interest of mothers-in-law a great blessing for so each customary proceeding, it would go hardly with them if there were—for when was a woman ever just, much less generous, towards the girl her son chooses to love and cherish!

"Of what?" repeated Stuart St. John, still with that angry cloud upon his brow.

"Of Alix," amazed that his thoughts could have wandered from the subject sufficiently for him to need to ask.

"I think she is a loving, true-hearted woman, but that she is also a St. John and, therefore, as proud and sensitive as she is gentle."

"I didn't mean her character, I meant her fate. Where is she?"

"I have no idea."

Sir Clarence took out his watch.

"She cannot have been gone three hours at the most."

"That is a long time in London."

"But then she knew nothing of the world, nothing of life. Alone in London Alix would be like a lost child."

"Only more difficult to find."

"Don't trifle with me."

"Sir Clarence, I assure you I am not. I came into this room little inclined for friendly intercourse with you, but I see now that you did care for that poor child, and are really anxious about her fate."

"Anxious!" Sir Clarence paced the room impatiently. "Anxious is not the word, St. John. I shall never have a moment's peace until I have found Alix."

"And you have no clue?"

"I was wondering if she had gone to her sister."

"Her sister?"

"You gave me the idea—you said they met this morning—blood is thicker than water. Miss St. John may have been charmed with my darling's innocent, childlike beauty."

"Miss St. John will never be charmed by any beauty but her own it strikes me."

"Do you know her? Don't you like her?"

"I have seen her twice."

"And don't you like her?"

Lord St. John looked him hard in the face, and answered quietly,—

"I think I hate her!"

"You hate her?"

"I feel like it."

"But I thought you took up her cause? You thought her neglected and oppressed; she is your ward and all."

"She is my ward, and her cause is the cause

of right, therefore I shall defend her interests; but, in a word, Manners, I shall take all care of Lord St. John's heiress; but I shall never make any attempt at intimacy with Margaret Lucy St. John, and I shall be only too thankful when she marries."

"Do you think she would be good to Alix?"

"I don't think Alix would go to her."

"Why?"

"Miss St. John disgusted me in half-an-hour by the way she spoke of her father. If her conversation had that effect on one who was almost a stranger to him, what effect would it have upon his own child?"

"But what am I to do?"

He threw himself and his troubles upon Lord St. John without the least apology. Clarence was essentially a weak character; his, too, was one of those natures which prize instinctively whatever they have lost. Alix, at his side, might have been a burden; Alix, beyond his reach, was something unutterably precious.

Stuart St. John hesitated; he could not confer with Mrs. Lacy on the subject because she detested Clarence Manners, and had never forgiven him for trifling with the affections of the girl whose story she had told to Alix.

"I think it would set your mind at rest to call upon Miss St. John. I will go there with you if you like!"

To Stuart's private satisfaction they were spared all meeting with his ward; the landlady announced she and "her ma" had gone to the theatre. Pressed by Lord St. John as to their visitors, her memory quickened by the piece of gold he slipped into her hand, she said there'd been but one lady call that day, and she hardly stayed half-an-hour.

"Do you remember her name?"

"I never heard it, sir."

"And she did not come back?"

"No, sir. I think she came to ask something of the ladies in the parlours; she looked sad enough when I let her in, but, as if she still were hoping and trying for something, a little while after I see her walk away, and she looked then as one who's got her death-blow."

"And you don't think she will return?"

"I'm kind of sure she won't, sir. Mrs. Russell—that's the other of my two ladies, you know—she told me quite sharp, if 'that young person comes again don't let her in; besides, we didn't come to London to be pestered.'"

"Wretch!" muttered Lord St. John.

"She ain't much else, sir," returned the landlady, who took the remark as addressed to herself. "They're going in a week's time, and I shall not be sorry. I never knew a more cantankerous pair; not but what the older one, bad as she is, is the best of the two; the other's nothing but a dressed-up stone!"

The simile lingered in Stuart's mind for many a day; he always thought it admirable.

"If she comes again," said Sir Clarence, speaking for the first time, and his voice feverish with eagerness, "will you find out where she lives, and let me know? I'll make it worth your while. The day you bring me that young lady's address I'll give you ten pounds."

"I'd like to earn it, sir. Money's scarce enough, sometimes, but I'm afraid I can't."

"You think she won't return?"

"I'm sure of it, sir."

"Well!"

The two men had left the house far behind them now, and stood in the busy thoroughfare of Westbourne-grove. It was getting late now, many of the shops were closed.

"Well!" repeated Sir Clarence, half angrily, "what is to be done?"

Stuart never resented his petulance; he put one hand rapidly across his brow as though he, too, had a burden of care. He was thinking of an episode in his life not yet many weeks old, and wondering how it had fared with the heroine of it.

He thought his "May" a nobler type of womanhood than Alix Manners. What had

become of her? She was as lost to him as Alix to her husband. Different as were their histories, there was one link connecting them—the utter mystery which hung over their fate. He only knew that May had gone back to her aunt. Well, Clarence had not even that consolation regarding Alix, and Alix was his wedded wife.

"I should put the matter in the hands of the police."

Clarence shuddered.

"I can't bear the thought of that."

"Advertise."

"I don't believe Alix ever looked at a newspaper in her life."

"She will have to look at them now."

"Why?"

"Don't you see she will have to earn her own living. She must seek employment, and what way more natural than the channel of the newspapers?"

Sir Clarence writhed.

"You don't mean it?"

"I do. What else could she do? Too proud to beg, too honest to steal, what is there left for her but the solace of the unfortunate—work."

A little pause, then Sir Clarence turned abruptly towards his companion.

"Why don't you curse me as I stand? Why don't you invoke Heaven's anger on my head?"

"Don't talk like that!"

"I am her destroyer!" went on Clarence, hoarsely. "If driven wild with misery and privation she attempts her life, whose will be the crime? Not his, I tell you. Mine—nobody's but mine!"

"I don't think she would take her life. You are too excited to be reasonable about it!"

Sir Clarence answered, simply,—

"If she had been for years my idolised wife, if I knew I had made her happy, I might take things more calmly. The loss would be as severe, the blow as keen, only I should not have this dreadful remorse on my shoulders. I did not make her happy. I had many troubles on my shoulders; heavy burdens to bear, and I let my irritation vent itself on her."

Only that morning he had regarded Alix herself as one of his burdens, but he had quite forgotten that, so inconsistent are men, especially men in trouble.

Lord St. John understood the misery at his heart; he never uttered a word of reproach. He devoted himself to the baronet as though they had been staunch friends, even accompanying him to Mr. Cameron's private house, Sir Clarence having at last consented to invoke legal aid in his search for his lost wife.

The solicitor received them with surprise, but it faded into concern and interest as he listened to their story.

"You must leave the matter in my hands, Sir Clarence," he said, gravely, "and I will help you to the best of my power. It is enough to make my poor client turn in his grave to think of his daughter's misery!"

"It is my fault," said the Baronet, slowly.

"Ah, Mr. Cameron! when I parted from you the other day I little thought how soon and how painfully I should need your help!"

"It is not all your fault," said the lawyer, who could be just in spite of his prejudices. "The wrong of which your poor wife reaps the punishment was done years ago, when, for the sake of a woman's beauty, Basil St. John concealed his first marriage, and banished his oldest child from his home. I suppose some people would pity your wife most, and others her sister; but to my mind, Sir Clarence, they are both victims of their father's folly—both Lord St. John's daughters are sinned against."

#### CHAPTER XIV.

The crisis was past and May lived; the little waif who had no real home and neither parent,

sister, nor brother, was not yet to leave the world which had proved so hard a place to her; perhaps, in the long years which stretched out before her, she would forget the bitter suffering of her youth.

The General and his wife were alone together in his study the next morning, their minds intent on the same subject, each reluctant to be the first to speak of it.

"We are very lonely now, John," and Mrs. Anstruther looked up gently into her husband's face. "We feel Daisy's loss just as much as when first she was taken from us."

"Just as much."

"We want a child, and that poor little girl upstairs wants a home. I'm sure she's known sore trouble, John."

"I should just like to have the handling of her relations, Lucy."

"But you wouldn't send her back to them?"

"Send her back!" thundered the General. "I'd as soon send her to be a white slave to some African negro. What are you thinking of, Lucy?"

"Then you'll let me keep her?"

"I'm thinking, dear, we must have found her on purpose. We shall not forget Daisy if we do have another young face to brighten our home."

Mrs. Anstruther looked up with a smile. Soon after she went away, having got, she said, all she wanted.

A few days after, May, dressed in a soft white wrapper of Mrs. Anstruther's, was carried into the boudoir and laid upon the sofa.

The General, very boisterous and fussy, but yet with a strange moistness about his eyes, insisted on covering her with as many shawls as if it had been the depth of winter, and Mrs. Anstruther sat beside the sofa and looked at her as if she could never gaze enough.

May felt very grateful to them for their kindness, only a dread fear tortured her of the time when she must leave them and go forth once more into the wide world.

"You are better to-day," proclaimed the General in a defiant tone, as though he challenged all Burton to contradict him at their peril. "You are very much better, my dear."

"Yes!" and the girl turned her sweet, star-like eyes full upon his face. "I shall soon be well. Have I been ill long?"

They did not tell her how long; they said nothing of the weeks she had hovered between life and death.

"We couldn't send to your friends, you know," said the General, bluntly. "We didn't know who they were; besides, they deserve to be a little anxious for letting you roam about the world at your age—a mere child."

"But I am not a child, sir. I am almost twenty-one."

"What's that! A mere nothing!"

"It has seemed a long time passing," said May, wearily. "Oh! General Anstruther, you saved my life, and I am very grateful to you; but, oh! I wish you hadn't!"

"What for?" demanded the General, sternly. "I can assure you it was a very close shave—a very narrow escape you've had."

May sighed.

"The world's such a big place," she said, sadly! "and yet, somehow, there doesn't seem a niche for me."

"We'll find you one. Now, my dear, just tell me why you were wandering about the world by yourself. Hadn't you any one to take care of you?"

May hesitated.

"I ran away," she said at last, in a trembling voice. "It was very wrong, but I could not help it; they were so unkind to me."

"And who were 'they'?"

"My aunt and Margaret."

"Then you have no parents?"

(To be continued.)

DEFECT in manners is usually the defect of fine perceptions. Elegance comes of no breeding, but of birth.

#### LOVE SONG.

I have gathered bright buds in the May-time,  
I have gathered red roses in June,  
In the earliest dawn of the daytime  
I have heard the first robin's gay tune!  
I have breathed the sweet violet's fragrance,  
Its hue like the soft, summer sky,  
Its exquisite colour and sweetness  
No flower in the world can deny!

I have sipped the sweet juice of the cherry,  
I have tasted of grapes the red wine,  
I have watched the sun shine, glad and merry,  
Until every smile has been mine!  
I've felt the soft touch of the south wind  
Blow lightly the folds of my tent,  
And between them have watched the stars  
shining  
Till the quiet of night was far spent!

But the buds and the roses have faded,  
The robin's sweet song has been sung,  
The violet's fragrance has perished  
Where careless its flower has been flung;  
The wine of the autumn is wasted,  
The sunshine's asleep on the hill,  
No longer the south wind is blowing  
The folds of my tent-cloth to fill.

Yet I thrill at the touch of a flower  
Held lightly in brown finger-tips,  
And I see cheeks grow red like a cherry,  
I see the rose-red of her lips!  
Oh, sweeter than buds of the May-time,  
Far sweeter than roses in June,  
Are the lips and the eyes of a maiden  
Whose voice robs the bird of its tune!

Of delights what a wide-spreading garden,  
All bright with the blossoms of May!  
I follow adown the green pathway  
Where th' honey-bee showeth the way!  
And I sing the song over and over,  
It rings on and rhymes in my heart;  
'Tis love that makes all my life brighter—  
'Tis love, oh, 'tis love, sings my heart!

C. S.

#### ALL AMONG THE HEATHER.

##### CHAPTER I.

##### HOW HE FOUND HER.

It is an evening in August, and seated waist deep among the purple heather, and half hidden by clumps of golden gorse, we see, for the first time, the little heroine of our story.

She is an elf-like looking child.

Her blue eyes are so dark as to be nearly black; her tangled, uncombed hair floats round her head like a golden halo, as the rays of the setting sun rest upon and bathe it with some of their own departing splendour.

But the baby face, though beautiful in feature, is sadly dirty, while marks of tears stain the pale cheeks, as though her childish heart had already been wrung by something more than childish sorrow.

This little creature of two years old, famished with hunger and parched with thirst, had cried herself to sleep some hours earlier in the day when the sun was high in the heavens; and here, among the heather on the Shirley Hills, she had slept the sleep of exhaustion, all through the burning August afternoon.

Stretched like a log by her side lay a woman, who even in her brightest days, could never have had a feature in common with the infant that apparently belonged to her.

The woman had fallen into a drunken slumber from which the child's cry fails to wake her, and the little one forgets her hunger for the moment as her eyes rest upon the purple flowers about her.

She had just clutched a handful of the heather when the sound of voices reminded her of her famished condition, and at the same



time roused a forlorn hope in the baby breast that a good lusty yell might bring relief, and she forthwith did her very best.

Still, her cries did not wake the woman, who lay like a heap of dirty rags beside her, but it brought two other persons somewhat hurriedly to the spot.

"I knew it was the cry of a child," exclaimed a young man, with a glance at his companion—a girl some two or three years younger than himself.

Then he bent down towards the little creature and asked,—

"What is the matter, little one? won't mother wake?"

"Elfe hungry," said the child, putting her hand to her mouth; "Elfe dreeful hungry."

"Oh! Lionel, pray don't touch the child," cried the young lady, in alarm; "you don't know but that you may catch a fever or even something worse. Come away, do; the woman will wake up soon, you may be sure. What a horrid thing she looks!"

But Lionel Denison did not heed the expostulation; he soothed the child by telling her she should have something to eat directly, and by giving her some bon-bons which he happened to have in his pocket. Then he turned his attention to the woman, who still lay silent and motionless—an ugly blotch upon the beauty of the heather.

He spoke to her first, but as this produced no effect he gently shook her.

She uttered no sound, however; and at last, despite his companion's protests, he took hold of her dirty wrist and tried to feel her pulse.

"I thought so," he said, letting the arm fall from his hand, "she is dead."

"Dead!" gasped the girl, with a shiver, "are you quite sure? Oh! this is too horrible."

"It is very, very sad," he replied, "particularly for this poor little thing, though." He added, with a quick glance from the dead woman to the living child, "I cannot believe that this was the child's mother."

"Most likely she was its grandmother," suggested Edith Grey, "she looks old enough; but do let us get away. I feel so upset that I don't know how I shall walk home, and what can we do with the child? Won't it be best to leave it till we can meet a policeman?"

"Leave it alone and hungry by the side of the dead!" exclaimed the young man, in a tone of angry surprise. "I shall certainly do nothing of the kind. Poor little creature, she shall go home with me until her friends can be found."

"And suppose she has no friends?" asked the girl, looking steadily and suspiciously at him.

"Then I will be a father to her," he replied, recklessly lifting the little one from the ground.

He had not meant to say this, and he had no serious intention at the moment of adopting the poor little human waif; but Edith and he had been very near a serious quarrel when the child's cry first reached them, and her words and manner irritated him now more than he cared to admit.

"If you adopt her you will lose me," said Edith, steadily, "so you may choose between us. I have no patience with such Quixotic absurdities."

He made no answer for the moment, and his face became very white, but he glanced first at the dead woman lying among the heather, then his eyes turned to the beautiful face of the girl who had promised to be his wife, and he was about to speak, when a little sob from the child nestling so trustfully in his arms touched the tenderest chord in one of the kindest hearts that ever beat in human breast.

"Poor, friendless, pretty, little thing!" was the thought that flashed through his brain. "If I were to forsake her I should deserve to be forsaken of Heaven in the hour of my utmost need."

Then he met the angry glance of his fiancée, and said quietly, though with decision,—

"I shall take care of this little girl until

someone who has a better right to do so claims her from me, whatever the consequences may be; and I shall be sorry if you disapprove of my doing so."

"So I should think!" was the disdainful retort. "Perhaps you would like me to take the clean little creature home with me?"

"No, thank you, my housekeeper will take every care of her," was the answer.

Then, with another glance at the dead woman, he walked away from the spot, carrying the sleeping child in his arms.

Edith Grey kept near him for a little while, wading through the thick heather, and spitefully kicking off as many of the blossoms as she could until they came upon the high road; then she paused and said,—

"I am going straight home. You can send the police to look after that woman without me."

"Yes, thank you," he replied, courteously; "and I will do all I can to keep your name out of the matter, so that you may not be made uncomfortable by having to attend the inquest."

Then he lifted his hat, as he might have done to a mere casual acquaintance, while she bowed, and turned in the direction of her own home; and it was in this way that these two—who had promised each other that all their lives should be spent together—parted, and tacitly dissolved the compact between them.

It must not be supposed that the finding of this little child was the real or the only cause of the rupture.

For some time past the lovers had been slowly but surely drifting apart, and Edith had come out for a walk with Lionel this very evening, with the fixed determination in her mind either to have an early day fixed for their marriage, or to break off the engagement altogether.

There were many reasons for this which she would not have liked to hear anyone else define, the principal of them being, that when she accepted Lionel she believed him to be a much richer man than he really was; and recently a far more eligible personage, from her point of view, had come to reside in the neighbourhood, and Miss Edith thought she would have no difficulty in securing this desirable gentleman's affections if she were only free.

She was not altogether devoid of feeling, and, above all, she had a great respect for Mrs. Grundy's opinion, and was very anxious not to get the character of a heartless jilt; besides, she did love Lionel Denison as warmly as her cold, selfish nature was capable of loving anybody, and therefore this parting was a shock to herself as well as a blow to him.

"I am glad that I have done it," she thought, as she walked towards her mother's house. "He is full of crochets, and we never should have got along comfortably together. The idea of his taking that dirty little brat to his own house instead of letting it find a home in the workhouse, as anybody in his senses would have done! No reasonable man could suppose I would submit to such an infliction, but Lionel was always visionary and Quixotic to the last degree."

Her face was flushed, and her eyes were bright with excitement, and she certainly did look very attractive, as, turning a bend of the road, she met a young man of some one or two-and-thirty.

"'Tis well to be off with the old love before you are on with the new, but don't lose any time," she thought, as, with a bright smile of recognition, which still further increased the singular charm of her beauty, she greeted the new-comer; and, Mr. Hazlewood, taking her extended hand, remarked how agreeably surprised he was to meet her.

He did not say "alone," but his tone seemed to imply it; and Edith, glad of the opportunity to announce her freedom to the man whom she meant to be Lionel's successor, at once began a highly-coloured statement of how she and Mr. Denison had found the dirty

child and the dead woman among the heather, and how he had declared his intention of adopting the little outcast.

"You know he is peculiar in a good many ways," she continued, in an apologetic tone, "and he has tried my patience so often that I have more than once felt that we were utterly unsuited to each other, but this last freak of his was too absurd. He might have paid someone to take care of the child; but to take her to his own house and adopt her is preposterous! Indeed, I spoke very strongly upon the subject to him."

"Naturally; and so you quarrelled?"

"No, we have not quarrelled; but we have parted," she replied, with languid indifference.

"Poor Denison!" said Hazlewood, in a tone which made Edith glance at him sharply.

But his face was turned away from her and she could not see its expression, nor could she feel sure whether her companion really pitied her discarded lover, or despised him for ever having loved her.

"I don't know why you should say 'poor Denison!'" she replied, petulantly. "I don't suppose he considers himself in need of pity."

"The greater his misfortune," returned Mr. Hazlewood, lightly; "but one man's loss is often another man's gain. By-the-way, what kind of a child is this one to which he has taken such a strange fancy?"

"I am sure I cannot tell you," was the answer. "It was such a mass of dirt and rags that I really could not touch it; and, in fact, I scarcely looked at its face. I am nervously afraid of fevers and of the dreadful disorders which I am told those tramps always carry about with them; but though I did not take notice of the child, I could not help observing the singular appearance of the dead woman."

"Why? What was there about her that was peculiar?" asked the man, with sudden interest.

"Well, in the first place she was old—quite sixty, I should think."

"Is that all?"

"No; her features were sharp and thin, and very clearly cut, while the skin was brown as a berry, and tanned like parchment."

"Perhaps she was a gipsy?" said Hazlewood, carelessly.

"Oh! no, she was not at all of the Romani type, but her face was anything but a pleasant one to look at; and as I think of it now, with the thin lips drawn away from the white teeth, it makes me feel faint and giddy."

She certainly did look pale, and Hazlewood said, quickly,—

"Pray take my arm, Miss Grey, the shock has been too much for you; but do try to rouse yourself. Don't faint, for mercy's sake. I shall certainly bolt if you do."

He uttered this ludicrous threat in such a tone of desperation that she could not help giving a little hysterical laugh which reassured him, and he supported her to a grassy bank by the road-side, and suggested that she should remain here while he went to get a conveyance of some kind in which to take her home.

She told him it was unnecessary, however, and that she would be better directly; and after resting a few minutes she was sufficiently recovered to walk home, though she accepted his proffered arm and leaned somewhat heavily upon it.

Her mother, seeing her enter the grounds of their small domain, thus escorted, smiled with satisfaction, though she was sufficiently prudent not to let Mr. Hazlewood see how pleased she was at the exchange which her daughter seemed to have made.

Meanwhile Lionel Denison, carrying the exhausted and half-famished child in his arms, walked on in the direction of his own house.

Had he not been in such a condition of indignation against Edith Grey, he would probably have thought twice before exhibiting himself with such a burden in his arms, upon a road where he was pretty sure to meet

people who knew him; but, as it was, he never thought of the strange appearance he might present, and when he reached the Hermitage he frightened his housekeeper half out of her wits, by marching straight into her room, and saying, abruptly, as he placed his burden in her arms,—

"Here, Mrs. Curtis, I have brought something for you to take care of."

"Why, it's a child, sir!" exclaimed the worthy woman, in unfeigned amazement.

"Of course it is," replied her master, with a grim smile.

"And it's alive!" continued the woman, her wonder increasing.

"Yes, I suppose it is alive, but it is famished and most uncomfortably dirty. Give it some food and wash it, and see if you can make or borrow some clean clothes for it, and in the morning bring the little creature to me?"

Mrs. Curtis looked at the sleeping child, then at her master, as she asked, doubtfully,—

"Do you know who she belongs to, sir?"

"No; I found her by the side of a dead woman, but this will be her home until somebody claims her. However, I can't stay to talk now; I must go and give information to the police."

Then he went out of the room, leaving the housekeeper to obey his orders, and to wonder what had come over her master.

Before she had recovered from her surprise her husband came into the room brimful of news and exultation, as he said,—

"I say, Peggy, something's up between the master and Miss Grey. It's an ill-wind that blows nobody good, and you may take my word for it we shan't have to turn out of this place, after all, through her."

"Why, what makes you think so?" asked his wife.

"I met her just now hanging on the arm of Mr. Hazlewood of Starcroft, and looking up into his eyes as we've seen her look at master—the deceitful jade—and as I passed by the study window, this minute, I saw the master with his hat on, sit down by the table, and bury his head in his hands just as if he was heartbroken; and putting two and two together, Peggy, I believe we've got a new lease of a very good berth, old woman. Why, by all that's wonderful what a you got there?"

It was the child that had, for the first time, attracted his attention.

In the dim twilight he had not observed the little creature as it lay in his wife's lap, but his voice had roused it from sleep, and it now began to cry lustily.

Remembering her master's order, Mrs. Curtis sent her husband for some milk while she gave the famished child a sweet biscuit, and the little creature was soon eating and drinking ravenously.

To wash the poor little thing was the next step, and the worthy housekeeper's womanly heart went out in tenderness to the tiny wail when she found how the baby limbs were fretted and sore with neglect.

But a surprise awaited her, for though the child's frock and outer garments were of the cheapest and commonest description, her linen was of very fine cambric, and her little bodice and petticoat were of the finest Saxony flannel, beautifully embroidered with white silk, though everything was shockingly discoloured with dust and dirt.

"This isn't the child of poor people," thought Mrs. Curtis, as she examined these things, "and I'll take care of the clothes, for they may be useful one day. I wonder if master does really mean to keep her here? I hope he does; there's nothing I'd like better than to take care of the dear little pot. Poor child, though she hasn't lived long in the world she has had a hard time of it!"

Then she put the little one to bed, though not without a lingering suspicion in her mind that her master must know something more

about the infant's parentage than he had told her.

This suspicion was not confirmed by his subsequent conduct, for he hardly looked at her the next morning; and afterwards, beyond inquiring occasionally if the child was well and likely to thrive, he evinced no desire to see her again, and showed no curious interest in her welfare.

Indeed, he seemed to have forgotten that the tiny girl was in the house. He shut himself up a good deal in his study, or went out for long solitary walks and rides, and at last he gave up a struggle which he seemed to have been maintaining with himself, and left home.

Before he went away, the woman by whose dead body the child was found was buried, at the expense of the parish, the guardians offering no objection to Mr. Denison taking charge of the infant instead of throwing the expense of her maintenance upon the heavily-burdened ratepayers.

In point of fact, they would have had no objection to his paying the expenses of the funeral had he been so inclined, but for many reasons he did not do this.

Rumour had already whispered many disagreeable surmises about his connection with the dead woman and the living child, so that Edith Grey not only received a great deal of sympathy, but was considered to be perfectly justified in breaking off her engagement with him.

When he had been absent from home a couple of weeks he returned unexpectedly, and astonished Mr. and Mrs. Curtis by announcing that he was going out to China, and should leave the Hermitage in their charge.

"And the little girl?" the woman was about to ask but remembering some of the stories she had heard whispered about, she thought her master might have made some arrangement for the little creature which he did not mean to communicate to her, so she discreetly held her peace.

A couple of hours later, however, Lionel Denison, sitting in his garden and meditatively smoking a cigar, was startled by a little dot of a girl toddling to his side, and saying, with childish assurance,—

"Elfie wants twocies."

He looked at the child sadly, though not without a certain amount of astonishment at her singular beauty, for the unusually dark eyes were set in a face that, now it was clean, was the perfection of infantile delicacy of colour and beauty of form, while the abundant golden hair, curled and waved with a wild grace that only nature could bestow.

The demand for sweets was repeated before he bethought himself of the small box of bonbons which he sometimes carried in his pocket.

It was out of this box that he had given the child some sweets when he found her, and he now handed her the box itself.

"Elfie give 'em ties!" said the little thing, holding up her childish face for the caress.

He bent and kissed the baby lips, and, strangely enough, the memory of that kiss remained with him long after Edith Grey's beauty was forgotten, and all love for her had died out of his heart.

## CHAPTER II.

### AFTER LONG YEARS.

FIFTEEN years have passed since Lionel Denison and Edith Grey took their last walk together on the Shirley Hills.

He was between one and two-and-twenty then, and she a little more than eighteen; now they are both on the shady side of thirty, and both are still unmarried.

That she is still Edith Grey is certainly not her own fault, for few women could have tried harder to advantageously change their father's name for that of some other man than she had done.

Failure, however, had dogged her footsteps from first to last, and whenever she seemed

most certain of success the greater had been her disappointment. The consequence is, that advancing years and too-long protracted single blessedness has not only increased the natural acidity of her temper, but has given to her features a certain sharpness of expression that makes her look the thing she really is—a snappish, fretful, discontented old maid.

Her first disappointment after Lionel went to China was Mr. Hazlewood, of Starcroft. He paid her marked attentions, and made love to her in the most open and encouraging manner, but he said nothing about matrimony; and when Mrs. Grey asked him at what date he meant to marry her daughter, he told her coolly enough that he had no present intention of marrying anybody.

The indignation of the two ladies knew no bounds, but it did not affect Mr. Hazlewood; and after a time another admirer appeared upon the scene, and Edith brought this affair successfully up to an engagement. But nothing came of it.

The gentleman met with some severe reverses, and Miss Grey promptly made the discovery that he and she were unsuited to each other, and had better part before it was too late.

So matters went on. One eligible bachelor after another was caught, and several widows had the most hairbreadth escapes, but all alike succeeded in slipping through her fingers before she was able to tie the knot there is no untying; and now we find her at three-and-thirty as eager as ever to change her name and condition, but with her chances of doing so very considerably diminished.

She is in a flutter of excitement this evening, however. Old memories have come back to her. She remembers the lover of her youth, the man with whom she had quarrelled because he would not leave a friendless infant to the tender mercies of the world; and now she tries hard to persuade herself that it is a lingering tenderness for him that has kept her single all these years.

When she ventures to hint this sweet consolation to her mother that practical old lady laughs in her face, and observes, with a sneer,—

"Persuade Lionel to believe that story when he comes back if you can, my dear; but you had better tell it to him before he sees that lovely girl over whom as a child you and I made the same choice now as he did then."

"Lionel will look for more than a pretty doll in a wife," retorted Edith; "and if he has been true to me all these years he is not likely to be lured away now by that baby face."

"But how can you suppose the man has ever given you a thought since he went away?" asked the mother, who in these later years had become very critical, and was not always as forbearing as of old. "He has not written to you once."

"No, but he has remained unmarried, which is much more to the purpose," replied Edith, with something like triumph in her voice.

Then turning to a glass she looked at her own face, and after a time she said with a sigh,—

"I wonder if he will find me very much changed?"

"Changed!" echoed the mother, disdainfully, "so changed that he won't know you if he meets you as a stranger. Changed, indeed! You are no more like you were at eighteen than I am, and if Lionel Denison remembers you at all it will be as he last saw you. But he isn't coming home to marry you, my dear; so don't prepare disappointment for yourself by thinking he is. He hasn't had that little beggar child educated like a lady for nothing."

"But he is old enough to be her father," protested Edith.

"What has that to do with it?" retorted her mother. "He is a young man still, and is probably far better looking than when he left England. No, there is not a chance for you,



Edith, unless you can get Elsie out of the way before he sees her."

Edith Grey tossed her head disdainfully as her mother spoke, but for all that the suggestion sank into her heart, and she began to ponder over the possibility of getting rid of Elsie until her own hold upon Lionel should be firmly established.

This was the more difficult to accomplish, because she had never been friendly with the protegee of Lionel Denison, but had looked upon her with the same feeling of aversion that she had felt when first she beheld her—ragged, unkempt, and unwashed amongst the heathen on the Shirley Hills.

Not that she or anyone in the neighbourhood had seen much of the beautiful girl since that August evening long ago; for one morning about a year after Lionel Denison had gone to China, his housekeeper received instruction to send the child in her care to a certain school in the north of England, where arrangements had been made for her reception, and he likewise intimated that he wished as few words as possible said to the little girl about her unknown parentage or the person who now supported her.

Mrs. Curtis read this letter to her husband, and remarked, significantly,—

"A nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse. I always thought there was something strange about the pretty dear. I shall be sorry to lose her, but it's for her good, and the master means to bring her up like a lady."

Then the good woman shed a few tears, and set to work to obey her master's orders.

But she did not send the child to the distant school; she took her there herself, and, in handing her over to the lady who presided over the establishment, she spoke of the little girl as Miss Elsie, and gave the impression, without actually saying anything to warrant it, that the youthful pupil was in some way related to Lionel Denison.

The effect of a word or a look will often influence a child's destiny, and good Mrs. Curtis, by her tone and manner, and by the deference with which she submitted to the childish whims of her little charge, certainly made the schoolmistress believe that the pretty, strange-looking creature was born to fill a good position in life.

So while Miss Elsie was petted and allowed to have her own way to a very considerable extent, she was always beautifully dressed; and, as she grew older, she had the advantage of studying under the best masters that could be obtained, and all the accomplishments which are considered necessary for the education of a gentlewoman were taught her as a matter of course.

It is true that the half-yearly bills that reached Lionel Denison were heavy, and had he been in England he might have grumbled over some of the items, but at such a distance from home this scarcely seemed worth while; and, moreover, he felt that he knew so little about the average cost of a girl's dress and board and education that to complain would only be to expose his ignorance upon the subject without much chance of altering the condition of affairs.

Mrs. Curtis, having brought the child to her new home, soon took leave of her, but the parting was to both a very bitter one.

The housekeeper went away with tears in her eyes, as though she had left behind her something belonging to herself; while the little one wept passionately, and for two days and nights refused to be comforted.

Happily the griefs of childhood are never very lasting, and poor Elsie gradually ceased to pine for the dear, kind face, which was the only one she could distinctly remember as having looked upon her with eyes of love.

For the next ten years Elsie was kept at the same school, and the only interruption in the monotony of her life was when Mrs. Curtis came to see her once a year.

When she was about twelve years of age Elsie paid a visit to the Hermitage for a few weeks, while arrangements were being made

for her to go to a school in France. But during this brief holiday the girl made no acquaintances.

Mrs. Curtis clung to her like her own shadow. Nobody called at the Hermitage; few people seemed to take any notice of the girl, and still fewer remembered anything about her infancy, so that not a hint concerning the manner in which Lionel Denison had found her was breathed in her ears.

On this occasion she met in her walks a lady who was no longer in her first youth, though the fanciful girl expressed her opinion to Mrs. Curtis that she must once have been pretty. She also called the housekeeper's attention to the fact that this lady always frowned angrily at her when they met, and that she seemed to regard her with positive dislike. But Mrs. Curtis never volunteered any remark, and at last Elsie asked her point-blank who the lady was, and why she looked at her as she did.

The answer was that it was a Miss Grey, but beyond this Elsie obtained no satisfactory information, for the worthy housekeeper declined to say any more than that Miss Grey was a crabbed old maid, and particularly warned Elsie against speaking to her.

"She is like the wicked fairy in the story books, my dear," said the old woman, vaguely; "and the less you ever have to do with her the better."

This warning, however, only gave Miss Grey an additional interest in the eyes of the imaginative girl, and more than once she had half-pursed, as though with the intention of addressing her. But Elsie had on each occasion turned away disdainfully, only as Elsie's holidays were not of very long duration, the danger which Mrs. Curtis dreaded was averted.

Things were changed now, however; Elsie had left school for good, and Lionel Denison, who had been absent from England for fifteen years, was coming home at last.

It is not to be supposed that Elsie had never asked any questions about her own parentage, for, in point of fact, she had tormented everybody with whom she came in contact upon the subject, and especially curious had she been to ascertain what relation her guardian, as Lionel termed himself, was to her.

No one could or would enlighten her, however, and she wore in her busy little brain many romances of which she was herself the heroine, and all of them were naturally based upon the presumption that her actual condition was what it seemed to be—that she was the daughter of a gentleman, was undoubtedly an heiress, and would one day marry a man who would be infinitely superior to all the rest of his sex.

Elsie is very excited at the thought that her guardian will soon be back in his old home, and she wonders what he is like and whether he will be kind to her, and she tries in vain to remember him.

She has always pictured him to herself as an old man, and in her last letter—the last that he could receive before she would see him—she had asked him to send her his portrait, so that she might recognise him on his return, while she sent him her own, that he might recognise her.

A long time elapsed before an answer came to her request, and one summer evening Elsie went down to the shrubbery gate to look out for the postman, because she knew the China mail was in. She was not disappointed, for he brought with him and handed to her the long-expected missive.

The grounds of the Hermitage were large and secluded, so instead of returning to the house Elsie turned into the shrubbery, and seating herself on a garden-chair, proceeded to open her letter.

There was a *carte-de-visite* inside the envelope, and girl-like she hastened to look at it before reading what the original of the portrait had written.

A strange sensation thrills her heart as, with eager eyes and half-parted lips, she gazes

on the likeness of the fine form and handsome face that can only belong to a man who is very much on the sunny side of forty.

"And I thought he was old," she mused aloud; "old enough to be my father, or even my grandfather, while, in fact, he is young enough to be my—"

She did not finish the sentence, for a voice close to her ear hissed,—

"Your husband, I suppose you think?"

With a wild cry of alarm Elsie sprang to her feet, and stood face to face with the woman who for so long a time had been such a mystery to her.

"Who are you?" she asked, angrily. "How dare you intrude upon me like this?"

"Intrude upon you!" sneered Edith Grey, with a bitter laugh. "You are a mighty important personage to be intruded upon, certainly. I suppose you think that people have forgotten under what circumstances Lionel Denison found you?"

"Found me!" echoed the girl, passing her hand across her brow, the better to clear her brain and realise the meaning of the words that fell upon her ears.

But Edith paid no heed to her exclamation; all the pent-up spite and animosity which had been accumulating in her heart against the girl whom she had made the ostensible cause for her rupture with Lionel Denison, now burst forth in such a torrent of contempt, accusation, and invective that she at whom the burning words were hurled stood mute with amazement, not unmixed with terror.

At length Edith Grey paused, not so much from having nothing more to say as from sheer exhaustion; and Elsie, clutching the top of the garden-seat for support with one hand while she pressed the other on her throbbing heart, found her voice at last, and said, painfully,—

"What you tell me cannot be true. If I had been found by the side of a dead beggar woman when I was a very little girl I must have heard something about it, and I should not have been brought up as if I were Mr. Denison's daughter. No, the more I think of it the more I am convinced that you have invented this cruel story because for some reason which I cannot understand you hate me."

"Hate you!" echoed Edith, her eyes blazing with the fury into which she had worked herself. "Have I not good cause to hate you? But for you Lionel Denison would never have been an exile in a foreign land during all the best years of his life, but would have been living here in his own house with me, whom he loved as his wife. Is it to be wondered at that I hate the serpent that has blighted his life and mine?"

There was such a world of rancour in the words, and in the voice of the faded beauty, and she looked so spiteful and so worn by time and disappointment, that Elsie, gazing at her, said, without thinking of the sting she might inflict,—

"But you must be much older than my guardian. He is young and handsome"—and she glanced at the portrait she held in her hand—"while you are—"

She paused, natural delicacy making her hesitate to wound the feelings even of a woman who had shown such an utter want of consideration for her.

"What am I?" was the savagely uttered demand.

"You—you—are almost old," replied Elsie. The faded woman gasped, but she had wasted her strength beforehand, and could now only answer feebly,—

"At any rate, I am three years younger than Mr. Denison, and I very much doubt if he doesn't look older than he seems in that photograph. Here, let me look at it."

But Elsie quickly thrust the unread letter and the *carte-de-visite* into her pocket, as she said,—

"It was not intended for you. If my guardian had wished you to have his portrait he would, no doubt, have sent it to you; and as



["WHO ARE YOU?" SHE ASKED, ANGRILY. "HOW DARE YOU INTRUDE UPON ME LIKE THIS?"]

for your assertion that I prevented him from marrying you, I simply do not believe it."

"It was not that he would not marry me, but that I would not marry him unless he sent you away from his house," replied Edith. "In a moment of anger he refused, and I would not listen to him afterwards, and he went away almost broken-hearted, but he has been true to me, and he may still be happy if you do not wreck the dearest hopes of his life a second time."

"I don't know what influence I can have upon his hopes or happiness," replied Elsie, sadly. "If I am no more to him than you say I am sure he will not consider my feelings on the subject if he wishes to marry you."

"But you don't suppose that I would marry him with you living in his house, do you?" demanded Miss Grey, with a sneer. "If I refused to do so when you were a child I should certainly not tolerate your presence now."

"I don't think you are likely to be asked to do so," was the courteous, though somewhat ambiguous, reply, as, with a slight inclination of the head, Elsie turned and walked towards the house, leaving the elder woman to look after her with eyes full of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness.

But though the girl behaved bravely and calmly enough in the presence of her enemy, she was, in truth, stung to the very heart.

Here was an intensely proud and sensitive nature, and until this hour she had never doubted for a moment that she was well born, and when at school she had, it must be confessed, looked with much condescension and some pity upon girls of plebeian origin. But now she was told that she herself came not even from a respectable if humble stock, but that she was the offspring of the very lowest of the low—that she had been picked up out of pity, and had ever since been simply a recipient of charity.

"If it is so, it was cruel of him to let me grow up in ignorance of my true condition," she thought, resentfully, as she sought the

seclusion of her own room, and read the letter which her self-appointed guardian had sent her.

There was not much in the epistle. The writer of it said he hoped she had been a good and industrious girl while at school, since it was very probable that she would have to turn her education to some practical account.

At any other time this suggestion would have surprised and annoyed her, but coming now as it did after Edith Grey's assertions, it seemed but a confirmation of the spiteful woman's story.

"I will ask Mrs. Curtis if it is true that he found me by the side of a dead woman on the Shirley Hills," she decided, as she folded up the letter and returned it, with the photograph, to her pocket. "If it is true," she went on, "and if I find that he and that dreadful woman were engaged to be married at that time, and that he is coming back now to make her his wife, they may both be sure that I shall not interfere with their comfort. I would take a situation as a kitchenmaid sooner than live for a single day under the same roof with her!"

She looked more fit to be a young duchess than a kitchenmaid as she said this, but she was terribly in earnest. Nothing should ever induce her to remain a burden upon the man who had hitherto acted the part of a father to her; and as for being an obstacle in any way to his happiness she would rather die a dozen deaths.

And that night, by dint of much cross-questioning, she extracted from Mrs. Curtis the story of how she was first brought to the Hermitage, and how Lionel Denison's engagement with Miss Grey was broken off in consequence.

"That's why she always looks at you so spitefully, my dear," continued the old woman, soothingly, "but she had only herself to blame for the master going away as he did; it wasn't your fault."

"No, it was not my fault," echoed Elsie.

But when she found herself again alone the agonising thought that filled her heart would find expression in words.

"The woman's story was true," she groaned. "I was but a little outcast when he picked me up and fed and sheltered me, and it seems, too, that I was the innocent cause of his great unhappiness. But this shall not happen again. I will go away from this place before he returns, and then he and that woman who hates me will neither of them find me in their way."

She shed some very bitter tears as she made this resolution, and the sobs which she tried to suppress almost choked her; for all the bright dreams of her girlhood were shattered, and she was about to throw herself upon the cold, pitiless world, knowing as little how to steer her course as does a flower cast upon the surface of a swiftly-flowing river.

(To be continued.)

THE GIRLS.—It has been suggested that young Englishwomen should go out with their unmarried brothers to India or Ceylon, or the colonies, to keep house for them and help them to find something of the comforts of home in their exile. England is overstocked with women, who are clamouring for work and votes and husbands. Coincidentally with this, a number of young men are year by year going abroad—a greater number each year, so rapid is the growth of Great Britain—and in a large number of cases they go out to that certain discomfort which we euphemistically speak of as "roughing it." The ordeal differs as greatly in degree as in its effects; but, beyond question, it does in some cases prove too severe, especially in Ceylon, where "fellows come in from a hard day's work on the slopes, fagged and weary, to their bungalow. There is food prepared for them by their native servants, but it is often not fit to eat; so one goes to the brandy for consolation."





["MR. VANRENAN," DEFIANTLY; "YOU THINK SO HIGHLY OF AUNTIE YOURSELF, THAT GERARD MIGHT WELL BE JEALOUS."]

NOVELLETTE.]

## HER GIVEN WORD.

### CHAPTER III.—(Continued.)

In the dim light she saw his face grow very stern, and the sombre shadows deepen in his eyes, but he said quietly,—

"I shall make no outcry if it is so. I have borne worse."

She pressed his arm in token of sympathy.

"Poor boy! poor old boy!" she said, tenderly; then with a sudden burst of sisterly affection, "I wish I could help you! I wish I had dared tell her all I have heard of Gerard Massey, but, perhaps, she would not believe me."

"She certainly would not. It is a grand thing to be loved by such a woman; but if she is not for me, Lucy, I have still this consolation—I can stand her friend and aid her in any trouble that may come to her."

"Do you anticipate any fresh grief?"

"Yes; and it will come through the children; Fred and Mab love her only for what she provides; in time they will wring her heart. Eva is gentle and affectionate, but will always be weak of will."

December wore away, and a new year dawned, and Mrs. Lake had finished all her packing, had bidden good-bye to Ismay, and was loitering for a few last words with Elaine.

"Be good to my darling, although, indeed, I need not ask that of you, but a mother's heart is so full of vague fears."

"I think I understand," Elaine answered, gravely. "Now Mrs. Lake, I have one favour to beg of you, with which to crown your goodness. If you should chance to see Gerard, tell him how glad I was to get his message, and say, too, that I am unchanged. Oh! with sudden passion, 'there are so many loving words I would send to him if I dared—if I dared! If I only knew that his message was

dictated by love and not friendship only, I would not hesitate to show him my heart as it is towards him."

She ceased, the hot colour on her cheeks and brow; then she leaned a little forward and kissed Lucy once upon the lips.

"You have been most good to me; I will endeavour to repay you in my care for Ismay."

"And," said the little lady, falteringly, "don't forget to be kind to my brother. He is a lonely and much-wronged man, and needs some good woman's friendship." Then she added, as an afterthought, with a covert glance at Elaine, "Now that his former wife is dead, some one may take pity on his pain, and teach him to forget his ancient sorrow."

"I hope so," gently; "he deserves to be a very happy man," and so they parted.

The Hall seemed very dull to Carey when Lucy was gone, and despite all she had told him concerning Elaine's infatuation, he was often tempted to speak to her of his own hopes and love; but for awhile he restrained himself, only he visited the cottage every day, and the villagers said his calls were not for his niece alone, and were glad to think that at last Miss Norris might be happy if she would.

"Sure," they said, "she will brighten the Hall, and be like an angel in it."

February and March passed tranquilly for the inmates of the cottage, then came April with her smiles and tears; and in every hedgerow, on every bank, the primrose and violet sprang into wild luxuriance; the blue-bell and anemone, the pimpernel and buttercup gleamed out from the rich growth of grass. Already the young birds were fledged, and the old ones found much employment in ministering to their wants, and instructing them "in the way they should go."

At this season, when all was so bright, when everything spoke of love and hope, Carey's heart rose within him in passionate protest against its so long-enforced silence; and a

voice he could not suppress clamoured loudly, "Tell her! Tell her!" until he could no longer refrain from speech.

So on a bright spring day, when the little ones were safely disposed of, and he was sure to find Elaine alone, it being a half-holiday with her, he walked to the cottage, and saw her standing under the old apple tree, where once she had stood to watch Gerard going, and faltered out her last entreaty to him for kindness and forgiveness.

The sun shone upon her pretty hair and flickered across her eyes, lightening for awhile the shadows in them; she moved towards him with slow, quiet grace; there was never any "hurry in her hands, no hurry in her feet."

It was this especial calm of hers that had at first won him to her, for after his stormy life he would fain find rest.

He transferred the flowers he carried from his hand to hers; they were choice exotics, and after thanking him for them, she moved towards the house to place them in water.

He turned and went with her.

"I came expressly to see you," he said, his voice somewhat shaken with agitation; "I left the children playing 'hide and seek' in the left wing. Ismay was the merriest of them all. Under your care she is growing quite robust."

"England has done much for her," gently, "and I think she is very happy with us!"

"Think!" he said, with a nervous laugh, "why she worships you. I warn Lucy that she will be forgotten, or fill only a second place; as for me I have become a cypher."

She smiled incredulously, and led the way into the house, whilst Carey's heart beat fast as he for the first time realised what life would be to him if she refused to listen to his pleading.

He was so much older than she, had passed through such terrible affliction, and yet the mere thought of what he had to say to her made him nervous as a youth, and almost choked his utterance. He watched her in

silence whilst she arranged the flowers in pretty, inexpensive vases.

"I am afraid," she said, "you have been robbing your houses, and breaking your gardener's heart for me, and I feel quite guilty;" then lifting her sweet eyes to him, and seeing him pale and confused, she spoke in still lower tones that were full of womanly sympathy, "Mr. Vanrenan, something has gone wrong, and you have something to say to me. Is it about Mrs. Lake? Oh! for your sake and Ismay's, I hope she is well and happy, and when she paused the man went nearer, but did not yet attempt to touch her.

"Nothing is wrong with Lucy, or with any of us; but you are right in saying I have something to tell you. Lay those flowers aside, and give me your whole attention for a short time, Elaine."

She obeyed him, for despite his goodness and generosity, there was always an air of command about him that set well upon his matured beauty. So she faced him with hands lightly crossed before her, and the sunlight playing about her sweet face and pretty rounded figure.

He was silent so long, that she said,—

"Is it a very difficult thing you have to tell?"

"Yes; but it has been so long a secret that the burden of it oppresses me beyond further endurance, and I have determined to end my suspense. Elaine, you know my painful story, all my past misery, and I, too, know the tale of your life; there is no secret between us. If, my dear, you can forget your former lover, and be content with my second love, which far exceeds my first—"

She tried to interrupt him then, and there was a frightened look upon her sweet, pale face; but the man's love had broken down all barriers of so long-cultured control. Hitherto he had been speaking calmly, but now he flashed into eager passion.

"Elaine, my darling, my darling! remember my need of you; think how lonely and incomplete my life is without you. Let us each forget the past and begin life anew together! I love you—surely you have seen it long?—I love you, and all that I have is devoted to you, and yours. There has never been a day since first we met that I have not hoped and prayed for this ending to our friendship. Love, love, you, will come to me?"

She shrank back from him, her hands outstretched as if to thrust him from her; but the pent-up passion of so many months seemed all restraint, and he followed her in her retreat.

"I know what you would say; but you must hear me first, Elaine. I don't ask you to come to me yet, whilst my love is still a surprise and a dread to you. I will give you time. I will wait so long as you bid me, if only in the end you promise to be my wife. But I do ask you to let me visit you in the character of an accepted lover."

"Oh!" she cried. "You have forgotten, Gerard, or you would not urge this treachery upon me."

Gerard's eyes blazed with scorn at the mention of his rival's name.

"No, Elaine; I have not forgotten; but it seemed to me a man who has proved himself alike incapable of love or generosity should have no claim upon you. I entreat you to put away all exaggerated ideas of honour and be good to yourself. He set you free by his own act long ago. He will probably never return."

"Still," Elaine said, with her usual gentle dignity, "I do not consider myself free. I believe that in Heaven's sight I am bound to him as closely as though I were his wife. I am his, altogether his, until he takes another woman to wife. Then I should hold it a sin to love him longer."

"Will you go on wasting your youth in vain hopes of his return, his constancy?" bitterly. "Is it always the unworthy one who shall be first in a woman's regard? My

love makes me bold to plead with you against yourself. Listen, dear. When the little ones are gone from you, and have made themselves homes elsewhere, when you shall have found all your faith and trust misplaced, and you, no longer young, sit by your desolate hearth, will not your thoughts turn with longing desire to those days? Often—ah! often the unspoken thought will torture you: 'If I had but have yielded to his pleadings!' For Heaven's sake, Elaine, be good to yourself and me."

He paused, and the tears coursed each other swiftly down her pale, pitiful face.

"If you love me so dearly, and I cannot believe you guilty of falsehood, you will not try to blacken him to me, neither will you wish me to be false to myself, to forget every instinct of loyalty. It may be, that in days to come, the children will learn and forget me, it may be he will never return; but I incline to a contrary belief, and else a lonely and perhaps wretched life in preference to faithlessness. Oh! believe me, I have loved once, and for ever, and cannot do you or myself as great a wrong as to marry you whilst I love another. If I had been free, I do not know—you might not have pleaded vainly."

"Hush!" he said, hoarsely; do not treat me to commonplace condolences; they are unworthy you, my dear, and neither deserve nor comfort me. See here, Elaine, I will not take 'no' for an answer, not now, when you are startled and agitated. I shall wait, and wait, and wait your friend and lover always. But I will not trouble you with complaints or necessities; only, my dear, for your own sake and the children's consider what I have said. I will not ask you to leave them. They shall be to me as my own, and Heaven knows I will endeavour to make your life happy. I do not say no trouble shall touch you, because love, however strong, cannot always avert calamity from the loved one; but no grief shall touch you that I can endure alone," and there she stayed him with a passionate gesture.

"Oh! you are most good to me, and I have deserved nothing of kindness or love from you. Had I known your hopes concerning me I would have tried to crush them by coldness and apparent ingratitude; but how could I guess the high honour you proposed doing me? With all my heart I thank you, I bless you; with all my soul I pray you may forget this brief dream of love."

"Brief!" he echoed, painedly. "I have loved you always from that Sunday I saw you in church, and my love will last throughout my life. There is no forgetfulness for me, and no other wife but you."

At last he had taken her trembling hands, and gently, slowly, he drew her towards him, until his dark face was bowed upon the masses of her hair; then, before she could struggle or protest against his will, he had taken her in his arms, and was kissing her with the terrible, despairing passion of a strong man.

"Love, my love!" he said, hoarsely, through his clenched teeth, "I will never give you up; the day will come when I shall call you wife, and until then give me something with which to solace my desolation. Kiss me, Elaine, kiss me, dear."

She lifted her face to his then, and her breath came in little sobs. She was so grieved for him she had no word to say. She kissed him once as he had implored, then she slipped from his embrace, and crying quietly, covered her face with her hands.

In a moment she heard his retreating steps; she knew he lingered at the door to look at her with love in his eyes, but she could not see him for her blinding tears. He was in the garden, his steps grew fainter and more distant on the gravel paths; she heard the click of the gate as he swung it open; then full of pity and remorse, fearing she had been unnecessarily harsh, she ran out, and reaching the apple tree strained her eyes to catch a glimpse of him, that she might recall, and, if

possible, comfort him. But he had passed the cluster of beeches, and then it came upon her with a sudden, cruel pang, that from this very spot she had watched Gerard striding away in anger three weary years ago, and she shivered in her heavy heart.

"Gerard, my dear, my dear, must I always weep and wait in vain?"

April had come in smilingly, with soft west winds and deep blue skies; but she went out very frowningly, and May, cold, black and as utterly unlike the poet's May as is conceivable, was ushered in without the beauty of blossom and leaf. Snow had even fallen in small quantities, and the winds were northern and east. Elaine was very careful to keep Eva and Ismay in the house; but one day, when she was absent on an errand of charity, the former escaped with Mab and Fred to the woods.

She came home cold and fretful, and Elaine, seriously annoyed, had a fire lit in her own room, and put the child to bed. Towards night she slept, but uneasily, and Elaine felt very anxious concerning her; but also was tired with the day's duties and could not remain awake, but in the middle of the night she was startled by a fit of violent coughing, and, rousing herself, found Eva writhing beside her in convulsions.

She ran to old Dorcas's room, and called to her, the old woman soon joined her.

"Dear, dear!" she said, "but she is bad. I will go for Doctor Bradley."

"Let me go, Dorcas, I can run the whole way; you must stay with Eva."

In another moment she issued from the house partially dressed, and wrapped in an ulster; she ran down the garden path, on to the road, and her heart began to throb with fear, when she saw a man advancing towards her, under the moonlight. It was a moonlit night, and she was easily recognised by Carey, who cried out surprisedly,—

"Elaine! Miss Norris! what does this mean?"

"Oh!" she said, hysterically, "I am glad it is you, I was feeling so nervous! But you must not stop me. I am going for Doctor Bradley; Eva has been taken suddenly ill!"

"Go back to the cottage," gently, "Dorcas may need you; I will bring Bradley as soon as possible."

She did not stay to thank him; indeed, he seemed to expect no thanks. With an imperious gesture he waved his hand in the direction of her home, then strode away. In an incredibly short time the doctor arrived. Carey stayed below, waiting to hear the verdict, and to know in what way, if any, he could assist Elaine.

She joined him after a short time, and her purple eyes were heavy with tears.

"Oh!" she said, "there is small hope for my child; she has been always delicate—it is inflammation of the lungs."

Then she broke into bitter weeping, and for a while was helpless in her grief. The man's true heart ached for her; he put an arm about her.

"Poor child!" he said; "can I do nothing to help you. Think of me to-night as of a brother, and remember my dearest wish is to comfort you."

"I know, I know!" she sobbed, not drawing from his encircling arms, "and, indeed, it is a comfort to have you near; you give me a sense of power and protection. But I am wanted upstairs, and you must not lose your rest for my sake. Please go home, but if you chose to come to-morrow I shall be glad."

"I shall call quite early and take the children to the Hall; the house should be kept very quiet." And then he was gone before she could thank him.

Early in the morning he carried off Fred and Mab, but Ismay begged to stay with Elaine, promising to be "quiet as a mouse," and neither Carey nor her governess could refuse her request.

For three days and nights little Eva lay in agony, unable to speak, only now and again uttering a feeble cry. Carey went to and from



the Hall to the cottage, carrying delicacies for the invalid, giving advice and help to Elaine, proving himself an invaluable friend and ally.

On the third night Eva seemed better, and he went back to the Hall, somewhat earlier than he had done the previous evenings; and Elaine sat beside the bed, holding one small, hot hand in hers. All day the child had hovered close to the borders of the cold river, but now she appeared so restless, so calm, that the aunt whispered to Dorcas,—

"She is certainly much better, she will recover now; remember how many attacks she has had—her hold on life is wonderful." She bent to kiss the wee, pretty face, then started back with a sharp cry, for a sudden, awful change had come upon it. "Dorcas! Dorcas! what is it? Oh, run for Doctor Bradley; she is worse."

"She is dead!" the woman said, with a sob, and taking her from Elaine's arms laid her back upon the pillows, then led her young mistress gently from the room.

In the morning, Carey found her sitting with her face in her hands, the very embodiment of despair. He laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"My dear," he said, pitifully, "it is best so," and felt ashamed of his own words. Elaine looked up at him with heavy eyes.

"For her, yes," she muttered, "but I loved her; she was dearer to me than the others. Why does Heaven afflict me so cruelly?"

What could he say? Perhaps he felt words were useless; he only stood by silently caressing her hair with his hand. But none of the funeral arrangements devolved upon the poor girl; Carey undertook all these things, and in afterdays Elaine wondered much at his goodness; it seemed to her so undeserved.

#### CHAPTER IV.

FIVE years had passed since little Eva died, and it was now eight years since Gerard Massey left Claremont; and all that weary while Elaine had received no tidings from him, but in her heart of hearts she treasured his message, and told herself he would eventually return to her.

Great changes had occurred since Carey's first declaration of love. Old Mr. Norris was dead; Fred, a tall lad of eighteen, was in a merchant's office in the city, where, if he chose, he might do well. But the youth had formed undesirable acquaintances, who drew his heart away from earlier and purer scenes, who tempted him (an easy prey) into sin, and taught him to be ashamed of the gentle woman who had sacrificed so much for him. In all his two years' absence he had visited Elaine but once, and then only for two days, which he had filled with complaints of being bored at Claremont.

"There was no society, and a fellow couldn't be expected to content himself with an old maid for a companion!"

Poor Elaine! She overheard his words, and set her teeth tightly upon her nether lip to keep down the passionate cry that rose from her heart.

She was almost glad to see him go, although her whole soul yearned after the graceless young prodigal. She remembered Mrs. Lake's words concerning the children,—

"You will slip out of their thoughts, their hearts, their lives. The more prosperous they are the heavier, and more shameful to them will be the debt of gratitude they owe you."

Ah! surely she had spoken truth, for Mab was away, and scarcely found time to write her; like Fred, she remembered Aunt Elaine only when some little service was required.

Mrs. Fountney, poor Rose's widowed sister, had lately married her daughter well, and, awaking to a sense of duty, or rather loneliness, had invited Mab to share her home, promising to do much for her.

Without a thought for "auntie," Mab had begged to be allowed to accept the "generous

offer," and Elaine, always self-denyng, self-forgetful, had consented.

It seemed to her there was no one left to love her. The children were gone, only Ismay, a tall girl of fourteen, and Casey clung to her.

Once, and only once, Mr. Vanneman had renewed his suit, but Elaine had firmly and gently told him that she yet waited for Gerard's return.

So in silence and in sorrow those eight long years had passed, and the giddy girls in the village called Miss Norris an old maid, and saw no beauty in her pale, sweet face; called her dull and old-fashioned; forgot the griefs she had suffered; and the married women, who remembered Gerard, wondered what he had found to admire in her. To them, rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes alone seemed lovely, and Elaine had neither.

Mab wrote occasionally, but only very brief notes, that spoke of her own triumphs and admirers; and it was with a feeling of surprise that Elaine received a letter from Mrs. Fountney, begging her to receive Mab for a few weeks, as the London season had quite exhausted her, and the doctor recommended absolute rest and quiet.

"If she can stay at Claremont until the close of August," wrote the lady, "I shall be glad, as we are going to Brighton in September, and I wish Mab to be as brilliant as usual. She is a great social success, and has pleased me much by her utter disregard of ineligible parties. She has none of her mother's foolish, sentimental notions, and, I am sure, will marry well."

Elaine did not feel elated by this eulogy upon Mab, but she wrote a very kind letter, bidding the girl welcome to the cottage; and accordingly she arrived quite early in August. She scarcely recognised her niece in the fashionably-attired girl who stepped from a first-class carriage, and looked round with an air that was almost supercilious. She did not recognise the stationmaster or the porters as they touched their caps to her, and she criticised Elaine's dress in a most unabashed way. But she was undeniably pretty. "Fine feathers make fine birds," and Mrs. Fountney had supplied her niece with everything to enhance her charms.

"I expect," she said, languidly, "I shall be bored to death while here; Claremont has so few attractions."

"The scenery is beautiful," Elaine suggested, almost timidly, and Mab said, in the same languid tone,—

"I don't care for nature, auntie; I prefer flirting, dancing, driving, to any rural beauties."

Elaine sighed.

Mab remarked sharply,—

"I hope my luggage is safe; there ought to be some conveyance from the station. Auntie, dear, please see my trunks are secure. I have three large ones, two smaller, and four hand-boxes."

She coolly waited whilst Elaine counted over her belongings, then walked on by her side, shading her pretty face with an elegant parasol.

"How hot it is!" she said, presently, "there is positively not a breath of air. Perhaps the heat oppresses me more because I am so far from well. See, auntie," pulling aside a daintily ruffled sleeve, "how thin I am. Oh! I have had a good time, but it has taken it out of me, rather."

"I am afraid you are very ill," the elder woman said, gently; "we must nurse you well again."

"Are there any fresh beauties?" Mab asked, almost bluntly, "and is Mr. Vanneman still unmarried?"

"He is still unmarried," gravely, and her heart sank at the change, or rather the development in her niece's character. "Why did you ask that, Mab?"

"I was thinking he would not be a bad party, although he must be almost forty. He has a princely income, a fine and unencumbered

estate. My dear auntie, I wonder you never tried to attract him."

"Mab, I wish you had never left me! How changed you are! Oh, my dear! be your old self to-morrow!"

The girl laughed.

"No, thank you, auntie. I was a fool to myself in the past; and although your training was *par excellence* in one sense, it was too old-fashioned to advance me one step. I have determined to make a good match. Feelings are so evanescent—so little worth, and money and rank are all in all."

"Mab!" Elaine said, her heart not hardening, but growing softer towards the girl, "your mother left you to my care. 'Oh, stay with me!—come back to the old, innocent happy life! I will try to make it bright for you. But, for pity's sake—for my sake—don't return to those who are warping and spoiling your better nature! You had better be a peasant's wife—if you loved him—than marry the richest man without loving him.'"

Mab looked at her almost disdainfully.

"I've no fancy for love in a cottage, auntie; and I don't believe in sentiment."

The words sounded strange and incongruous, coming from such rosy, smiling lips.

"The fact is, you've lived so long in this wilderness of a place that you have contracted all sorts of comical, old-world ideas."

Elaine winced, and the slight, ever-ready colour flickered into her face.

"Had one told me six months would so change you, Mab, I would never have allowed you to leave me."

"I think my mother's people are the best judges of what is good for me," the girl retorted, carelessly, and walked up the garden in a languid way—which was, perhaps, the result of her ill-health as much as of her fashionable mode of life.

Old Dorcas ran out to meet her, and would have kissed her, but Mab said, coolly,—

"I'll dispense with the kiss, Dorcas; and, pray, don't ruffle my lace." To Elaine she remarked, audibly, "Such people must be kept in their proper places," then went up to her own little room, which smelt now of lavender, and was filled with vases of yellow and red roses.

She tossed aside sunshade and hat and sat down wearily. The walk had tried her strength severely, and the pretty colour had left her rounded cheeks.

"Oh," she said, regretfully, "I shall die of ennui here! How I wish I were with Aunt Fountney! However, next month—next month!" and her great grey eyes sparkled with anticipation of pleasures at Brighton. "Aunt Elaine begins to look old and peaky," so ran her thoughts as she brushed out the masses of smooth brown hair, and then proceeded to twist them about her shapely head. "How stupid she is to remember Gerard Massey. He'll never marry her; and folks say if she chose she might be mistress of the Hall! There's no accounting for some men's taste," contemptuously. Then Dorcas summoned her to dinner, which had been delayed on her account.

Later Carey Vanneman made his appearance. Once, and only once, during the past five years had he renewed his suit, and Elaine had told him gently, but firmly, there could never be anything but friendship between them.

Still he visited her, hoping against hope—loving as only men of his nature can love—purely, strongly, unselfishly.

He found Elaine sitting with Ismay at an open window, whilst Mab lay upon a couch—a slim, graceful figure in white, with a face as innocent as if no thought of "eligible parties" had ever crossed her busy little brain.

He shook hands with her, and expressed himself glad to see her again; and, with an imperious gesture, half-coquettish, half-grave, she motioned him to sit beside her.

"Talk to me," she said, with a pretty, artificial smile. "I am positively dying to hear the Claremont news," and she flashed a glance at him through her heavy brown lashes.

"Auntie has grown so awfully quiet. Won't she make a charming old maid?"

"Miss Norris will always be 'charming'—(by the way I object to the word, whether maid or wife!)" his tone cold, despite its courtesy. "It is not always wives who are the happiest of women."

Mab laughed softly.

"How hot you can be in her defence! But, pray, don't be angry with me. I meant no harm. I have only fallen into a flippant way of speech. Remember, too, I am an invalid and must be humoured."

"Even to your own hurt?" coolly. "I for one shall not join in the general spoiling, Miss Mab."

She pouted prettily.

"You imply I am spoiled. That is hardly nice. Now tell me, seriously, Mr. Vanrenan, am I not improved in every respect?"

She lifted saucy eyes to his, but he made answer with grave deliberation,—

"No; I preferred you when you were a careless hoyden. Your manner, like your dress, is elegant, but unreal." Then he crossed to Elaine and bent over her, leaving Mab a trifle vexed. "Come out with me," he said. "I want to tell you news that you will call good."

Without a word Elaine rose and followed him into the garden.

"It is about Gerard," she said, and her voice was tremulous—her face white with agitation.

"Yes," he answered, gently; "it is of Mr. Massey I wish to speak. I have heard to-day from Mr. Pomfret that he is on his way home." He paused, but she did not speak, only in her lovely eyes there was a look he had never seen before. "You are happy," and he wondered at his own hoarse tones.

"Yes," she whispered, "I am very happy;" then, with sudden remembrance, she glanced into the pale, grave face, and cried, remorsefully, "Ah! forgive me! I had forgotten you. Oh! if I could make you happy, too! You have been always so good to me; and I have never done anything to deserve your loving kindness, nor to show my gratitude!"

He smiled sadly.

"Don't remember me or my pain; think only that I have always found my greatest joy in working for and ministering to you. I know now, my dear, that you have been right in not listening to me. No word I could say has ever had power to bring such a look of gladness into your eyes as the mere tidings of his return has done. But when he comes, you will not deny me your friendship? I think I have so much claim upon you?" and, impulsively, she laid her little hands in his.

"Can I ever forget your goodness and all I owe you?" she questioned, and in the gathering dusk she looked young again; as in the days when Gerard had found her fair and loved her. "Tell me," she said, in a low voice, "all that you know of him," and in that hour's gladness she did not doubt he was returning to her. She judged his heart by the loyalty of her own.

"He has made a fortune, and is returning to spend the remainder of his life in England. I cannot tell you more than this, unless I add what seems superfluous—he is still unmarried!"

They stayed long in the dusky garden, and when at length Carey left her, he went with slow, sad steps to his own home, and the lines of thought and care were very visible upon his brow and about his firm mouth.

Elaine glided across the little lawn, a smile in her eyes and about her lips.

"My joy makes me selfish to-night," she whispered; "but to-morrow I will be sorry for him."

Ismay had gone to her room, but Mab lay upon the couch still, looking pale and weary. She glanced at Elaine with an expression of wonder.

"What has happened to you? You are quite transformed!" she said, and the other

kneelt beside her, laying her happy face against her niece's.

"Mab, be glad with me!" she said. "He is coming home."

Mab lifted herself on her elbow and stared with unmitigated surprise at the flushed cheeks and shining eyes.

"Has he written telling you so, or did Mr. Vanrenan bring the tidings? Were I you, auntie, I wouldn't build my hopes too much upon Gerard Massey. Why can't you think of your other suitor? According to the old vulgarian, 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.'"

Elaine drew away from her, hurt and a little angry, but the girl went on coolly,—

"You haven't met for eight years, and he doubtless remembers you as you were!"

"And you see so great a change in me that you think he will be disappointed?"

Her lip quivered, and for a few moments the happy light left her eyes. Mab regarded her with some show of scorn.

"It is foolish to rely upon a man's constancy; and, for aught we know, to the contrary, he may have left a Hindoo wife behind. I don't think it a proof of love that he has kept silent for eight years. It reminds me of the prince in the story who 'loitered on the road too long,' and 'trifled at the gate.'"

For the first time in her life Mab saw Elaine really enraged. She sprang up and cried out, sharply,—

"Silence! silence! Oh! shame on you to mock at my love and my waiting! Was it not for your sake I sent Gerard away? Because you were bound to me by ties of blood, and I had given my word to work for you, love you, did I not deny myself all joy, and put away from me all I prized? For your sakes I endured his anger and sent him away lonely, doubting my faith and my love; and when others told me what reward I should reap for all my pains, I would not listen or believe. But the prophecy has fulfilled itself; Eva is dead, Fred has forgotten me, you despise me, and if, as you hint, Gerard no longer loves me, or, seeing me, turns from me, oh, Heaven! what shall I do? Oh! why have you spoiled my first hour of happiness? I would rejoice in your joy, why do you grudge me mine?" and suddenly she covered her face with her hands and sobbed bitterly.

Mab, frightened and a trifle ashamed, lay huddled upon the couch, but she ventured to say,—

"Auntie, you misunderstood me. My intention was not unkindly; I only wished to prepare you against a possible disappointment. And as for your goodness to us, why none would deny it; and you wrong me greatly when you say I despise you."

Elaine lifted her head wearily.

"Child," she said, for between seventeen and twenty-eight there seemed an immeasurable distance, "I see more clearly than I used to do, and I know how you esteem me; but I was wrong to be so angry with you. Perhaps, as you say, Gerard will be disappointed in me."

"I'm sure, aunt, you are very pretty and remarkably young in appearance," with all the insolence of careless youth, "but I do think it a pity you won't listen to Mr. Vanrenan. I haven't a doubt that he is a far handsomer man than Gerard Massey, who probably has grown stout and bald. I've heard India doesn't improve a man's appearance."

"Would you like to go to your room?" Elaine asked, abruptly. "You look tired," and Mab, thankful to escape an unpleasant *tête-à-tête*, went gladly.

As Elaine passed Ismay's door the girl opened it, and lifted her face for the good-night kiss.

"Miss Norris," she said, quickly, "you have been crying. What has happened? Has Mab been saying unkind things?" and the pretty dark face flushed angrily.

"My darling, no! I have only been very foolish."

But Ismay shook her head doubtfully, and said,—

"If you are in any trouble you must let Uncle Carey help you—and—and I have some money."

Elaine smiled.

"I do not require any money, dear; now go to bed and to sleep. Good-night, Ismay."

"Good-night, dear Miss Norris," and the child watched her with loving eyes as she passed slowly along the corridor.

Day after day passed, and Mab was fast recovering her lost health and bloom, and was full of lively anticipations of pleasures to come when she should join Mrs. Fountney at Brighton; and one morning there came a letter to Elaine in a handwriting that made her tremble and grow pale with passionate love and joy.

Shutting herself in her room, with hasty fingers she broke the seal, and through a mist of happy tears read the only words that Gerard had written her in eight weary years.

"Carlton Hotel, London, W."

"MY OWN DARLING.—I am now in London, as you will see by the above address, and only waiting a line to bring me back to you. When I left you in anger and pride I was an obstinate and selfish fool, and could see no beauty in the sacrifice you then made. But passing years have taught me wisdom, taught me, too, that I never was, and never shall be, worthy you. And yet, my darling, if you can forget the cruel things I said at parting, and the pain I have made you bear; if you can assure me you still love me as once you did, I will come to you and we will not part again. If your heart is hard against me, remember that no other woman has ever won a second thought from me; and if you will not fulfil your promise of long ago I shall, for your dear sake, be a lonely man through all my life. You will say, why did I not write you before? To which I answer I was afraid, and many times I pictured you the wife of some good man, and not until I received word to the contrary from Mr. Pomfret would I venture to address you again in the character of a lover. I know your heart is too good, too tender to keep me in suspense. I deserve no kindness from you, and yet I fear no harshness. My darling, good-bye.—Yours until death,

"GERARD MASSEY."

The patient, loving woman sobbed aloud in her new, great joy, and when her tears were passed she was still so agitated and so happy she could find but few words to reply to his entreaty, but those few spoke volumes.

"As I loved you once I love you now. Come to me, Gerard."

They contented him.

Late one summer evening he arrived at Claremont, and, walking swiftly to the cottage, was met by Dorcas in the clematis-covered porch. She welcomed him warmly, although, in her heart of hearts, she did not love him. He had grown a beard and was very bronzed, very handsome, and yet there was less of sincerity and honesty in his eyes than once there had been—men did say he had won his fortune by subtlety.

But the old servant knew nothing of this, so she simply told him "Miss Elaine was alone in the parlour," and made way for him to pass. Outside the door he paused, his heart throbbing with old memories that he had long ago believed dead; inside Elaine stood trembling, flushed, happy, dressed with utmost care in some soft clinging material sent her by Mrs. Lake, which gleamed and glistened in the lamplight, showing red and cream, and shading away into manifold hues. She looked young as in the old days, and when Gerard entered it seemed to him scarce a day had passed over her since they parted.

"My darling!" he cried, in that moment loving her passionately, "my darling!" and with one low cry of satisfied longing she ran into his outstretched arms, and clung about him, sobbing out so sweet a welcome that the man's heart might well leap within him.



"Forgive me, dear," she pleaded, and the shining eyes, lifted to his, told no tale of remembered wrongs, and the voice, all broken with happy tears, breathed only of unwavering love and trust.

"Oh!" she cried, her arms about his neck, "What shall I say to welcome you back? Gerard, my dear, my dear, I can say nothing, I can only feel glad;" then for awhile she lay in his embrace, and it seemed to both that this night, happy as it was, was only the beginning of a long series of happy years.

It was long before they could talk coherently, and when at last Elaine found space to speak between Gerard's passionate kisses, she told him the story of her life since he left her under the old apple-tree. Many times Carey Vanrenan's name was spoken, until at last the lover jealously demanded to know more of him, and Elaine disclosed all save his love for her, his goodness, his generosity; and Gerard said with a frown,—

"Now I have returned he must visit the cottage less frequently; and, love, the school must be dismissed, I want my wife to come to me with all possible speed; I have waited long enough for her." Then he lifted her face between his hands, "you have not changed in the least; you are just as pretty and quite as young in appearance as when first I loved you."

"Wait," she said, with a smile, "to-night I wear butterfly plumage; in the morning, when I put on my sober dress, you will be compelled to change your opinion," but with a kiss he drew her nearer, laughing her words to scorn.

He heard the sound of girlish voices in the hall, but neither Ismay nor Mab came to disturb them. He had much to tell Elaine, and she thought he was laying his whole life bare before her. She did not dream there were passages in it he could not divulge to her for very shame; she saw no change in him, she believed wholly and entirely in him as in the early days of their love.

It was late when he rose to go, and he begged her to walk with him to the garden gate, so together they trod the familiar path, he with his arm passed about her waist, she looking into his face with passionate, satisfied love. How pretty she was with the moonlight playing upon her hair and happy face! How low and exquisite her voice. A sense of deep and perfect rest came over Gerard as he stood silent beside her.

Then once more he stooped to kiss the tender mouth and wishing her good-bye, yet returned again and again, scarcely able to tear himself from her.

Long she stood listening to his retreating steps, long after he had reached the inn she watched lest haply he might return; then she stole back to the house and to her room, to kneel down and thank God for his goodness to her.

The new delicious sense of joy made her night wakeful, but she rose early in the morning fresh and fair, and went about her duties with a light heart; the children wondered at the brightness of her face—the unusual tenderness in her voice. The tasks did not weary her, the pupils, if stupid, did not harass her, because Gerard had returned to her, and life could be no longer dark for her.

Meanwhile Mab wandered by herself through some adjacent meadows, inwardly voting life at Claremont a fearful bore, and wishing herself away. Very pretty she looked that morning, walking with a careless grace and carrying her hat upon her arm; the dainty colour had returned to her cheeks, and she was fair enough to delight an artist's soul.

Wearily of meadows and lane, of all the beauties spread out before her, she turned homeward at last, and entering the garden leaned upon the gate, and gave herself up to discontented musings.

Gerard came upon her suddenly, and before she knew he was near, had taken in every detail of face and form, every item of the dainty dress. It flashed upon him this tall,

slim girl must be Mab, and he called her by her name, startling her considerably.

She bent a pair of great, grey eyes upon him inquiringly, and he saw she was very pretty; then she slowly and languidly, put out one small hand to meet his, and said,—

"You are Mr. Massey, I think?"

"Have I grown beyond knowledge?" he questioned, smilingly, and Mab answered coolly,—

"I have been picturing you to myself as bald and stout. Mr. Massey, you are a snare and a delusion."

"Believe me I am so unintentionally," laughing; "if I had not enjoyed my bachelor freedom so long I should probably appear as 'the bald party.' Elaine will remedy all such defects, doubtless."

Mab's arch eyes met his, and she laughed.

"I wonder you recognise me. I was such a tiny child when you went away, and now I am taller than auntie, and I have been out a whole season."

"It was not difficult to recognise you," he answered, "and you have grown wonderfully like Elaine, only your eyes are grey whilst hers are purple—and of course you look younger."

"Yes"—complacently—"she looks old unless when excited, and she really lacks animation; otherwise she is pretty."

Gerard's expression was one of mild surprise as he answered,—

"I could see no change in her last night; she looked exactly as she did when I first asked her to marry me."

Mab smiled a trifle disdainfully.

"Love is blind, Mr. Massey; but shall we go in? School is ended; see, the children are leaving."

She walked to the door with him then, flitted upstairs, and he entering the schoolroom found Elaine there alone. As she rose to meet him the level beams of the relentless sun fell athwart her face, and discovered certain faint indications of care upon the broad brow; and Gerard thought that in her plain brown dress, with simple linen cuffs and collars, she looked neither so young nor so fair as on the previous evening.

He stifled the thought as being disloyal to her, and took her in his arms. Whilst she clung about him the old tenderness and love revived—there is so much in the touch of a hand, the sound of a voice. The feeling that possessed him all through his long voyage held sway over him once more; and yet—and yet, half his gladness at meeting Elaine again was the result of only yearning for familiar faces and scenes. He smoothed the rippling hair away from her brow—certainly her beauty was on the wane—but she lifted her lips to his and again he was content.

But why was it that, as he walked back to the inn, a younger face than hers flitted before his mental vision, and ringing tones, less true, less tender than hers, sounded persistently in his ears? He was discontented with himself and all around, and once the thought flashed through his brain that he had been wiser to have held his peace about their mutual love until he had seen the changes time had made in his former betrothed—until he had tested the depth and sincerity of his own old passion.

But in the evening he went again to the cottage, to find Carey Vanrenan there, doing his best to amuse Mab and Ismay, and he felt angry that this dark, grave man should claim so much of the former's attention. Perhaps to disguise this feeling he begged Elaine to put on her hat and walk through the meadows with him; the night was clear and brilliant, so that he could see her happy face and the wonderful light in her eyes. A sense of his own unworthiness came upon him as he held her closer.

"My dear," he said, "I am a poor sort of a fellow for so good a woman as you; for your sake I wish I were better."

The small, slim hands about his arm tightened their clasp as she said,—

"Don't you know I would not have you

different if I could? As for your unworthiness, it is not palpable to me, Gerard."

"Yes," he thought, bending over her, "she is still very pretty," and was almost satisfied. "Elaine," he said, abruptly, "does Vanrenan often come here?" and his face had clouded suddenly.

"Why, yes, almost every day when school is ended. You see, Ismay is his niece."

"But he comes principally to see you," testily. "Ismay Lake is but a flimsy excuse at the best, and his manner towards you is too familiar. I shall beg him to make his visits less rare, and his friendship towards you less pronounced."

Elaine looked startled.

"My dear," she said, gently, "you cannot tell how good he has been to me; you would not anger him or wound him in any way. But for his kindness many a time I should have given up the fight I have so long maintained—"

Gerard broke in passionately,—

"You have praised him very highly—have you finished? It may be I am jealous, but I will have no rival in your love—I must be all or nothing!"

Ah! long ago he had used those very words to her, and at the remembrance her sweet face paled, and her wonderful eyes looked reproachfully into his, but she said,—

"Do not let us quarrel, dear; it shall be as you wish. I will tell Mr. Vanrenan to-morrow that you object to our friendship. But, Gerard, if you forbid me to meet him, although I shall obey you, my heart will cherish the memory of his goodness, and will long to prove its gratitude to one who has always stood my friend, counsellor, and help."

For her the glory of the evening was past, and an uneasy sense of something wrong oppressed her.

"The night is spoiled for us," she said, "let us go in, Gerard."

He went in with her, ill at ease with himself, resolving in his own mind that she could never content him. What a fool he had been to compromise himself by that letter! How idiotic had been his joy of the previous night! It came upon him fiercely that he did not love her, and he scarcely understood why he had written her to the contrary. Old scenes, old associations, had softened his hard nature, until he himself believed he loved her as in the days of their lost youth; but that dream was broken, and he felt angry (as a man always does when he is in the wrong), and tried to cast the blame of it all upon Elaine.

Together they entered the room, where Ismay was talking in a whisper to Vanrenan, and Mab, seated at the piano, was carolling the chorus of a not too-refined or intellectual song.

"It's best to be merry and wise, it's best to be honest and true;

It's best to be off with the old love before you are on with the new."

Gerard wondered why her words struck so sharply on his senses, and why, when she rose and came towards him, he grew more angry with Elaine.

"You think me frivolous as all the others do," said Mab, and her voice was softer than usual.

He found no words with which to answer her; he only knew he was glad she was by him, and Elaine had flitted to Vanrenan's side.

The lamp was not lit, and he saw Mab's face only by the moonlight.

How fair it was! How slim and willowy her white-robed figure! How bright her great, grey eyes!

"Talk to me," she said, imperiously; "I am positively dying of silence," and she sat down so close by him he could touch her hand.

Meanwhile, Elaine was talking softly, earnestly to Carey.

"Mr. Vanrenan"—ah! how her voice trembled with pity for him—"I have a very difficult task to perform. I wish it had fallen to any but me."

"You have a message from Massey to me?" he questioned, steadily, although his strong heart quailed before the blow he knew she was about to strike.

"Yes. Do not think harshly of him. He is jealous of our friendship, and begs your visits may be less frequent. Oh, my friend, my friend, forgive me! Believe I am not ungrateful or forgetful; only now—now—"

"Now you must obey him," Carey said, no star in his tone or manner. "I understand, and thank you for telling me yourself. I shall not come again until you need me. I may visit you the Hall daily."

Without another word he passed from the room, no one heeding him save Irmay, who looked after him with dismayed eyes, and questioned—

"Oh! Miss Norris, what have you said to make?"

But Elaine could not reply.

## CHAPTER V.

So Gerard had his way, and separated Elaine from her best, perhaps only friend, yet he was not satisfied. If he saw a cloud cross her face he would jealously intimate that she was thinking of Vanrenan, and missed his daily visits more keenly than she would have felt his own absence.

She said very little in answer to these up-braidings, because she told herself they were the result of his love, and so forgave him.

As the days lengthened into weeks a great change came over him. He was always moody or radically gay, knowing no medium; and Elaine pondered in her own mind what could trouble him.

She was far from guessing the truth, never once associating the change with Mab; and she believed so firmly in Gerard that she never for one instant doubted his fidelity. But all through those golden August days whilst she sat busy with her pupils, he wandered through meadow and lane with pretty Mab, who began to exercise a nameless influence over him. At first he stood against it with all his might, but long years of selfish indulgence had weakened his power of resistance, and in a very little while he gave himself wholly up to the charm of her society—the new passion that must destroy Elaine's happiness. He sought Mab on every available opportunity; he shared her pleasures, he read to her, talked more brilliantly to her than he had ever done to Elaine, and the girl was fascinated. The little heart she had she surrendered to him, and did not recognise the base part she was playing towards his friend.

Carey Vanrenan, meeting them often in his walks, grew afraid for Elaine, but he said nothing, only a hot resentment smouldered in his heart, waiting for but a breath to fan it into flame.

One day he came upon Mab alone, and determined to appeal to her sense of right. His grave face was very kind, though firm, and because of her youth he suppressed all the harshness so ready to creep into his voice.

"May I walk with you, Mab?" he asked.

And she answered, readily—

"I shall be glad if you will. I hate solitary rambles."

"Where is Mr. Massey?"

The girl lifted her eyebrows in pretty surprise, but she flushed a little, too, as she said—

"I don't know, Mr. Vanrenan. We have not seen him at the cottage to-day."

She eyed nervously a moment with her smothered, then asked, swiftly—

"Why did you put that question to me? I am not his keeper."

The man took her little disengaged hand in a kind clasp.

"Why do I ask? Because he is almost invariably with you. My dear, I think you don't understand the wrong you are committing. I am unwilling to believe you would bring sorrow to Miss Norris."

"Really," she faltered, "if you wish me to

comprehend your meaning you must speak more plainly."

"I am sorry that you force me to do so," dropping her hand. "I wanted to spare you as far as was possible, but you will not have it so. Very well, Mab, I will speak plainly. You are doing a wrong and unwomanly thing when you encourage the attentions of Gerard Massey—a man who has so long been promised to another woman. That you do so I am assured by many signs you have unconsciously shown me; I don't blame you so harshly as Massey, because he is so much your senior, and knows very well he is treading on dangerous ground."

"You are presumptuous, Mr. Vanrenan; neither Mr. Massey nor myself forget his engagement."

He smiled bitterly. "You must suppose me extremely credulous to place faith in such a statement, and you don't understand that by your own words you make your conduct appear blacker, if you do not forget the greater shame to you both."

Mab grew frightened of this dark, angry-faced man, who spoke so unsparringly.

"Mr. Vanrenan," she said, almost tearfully, "you are very unjust to me—and you used to be kind."

"I wish to be so now," gravely, "if you will allow me. I should like always to stand your friend. Child! child! what is it you are doing? Will you wantonly steal away your aunt's lover?"

At the reproach in his voice she became angry; lately she had listened only to compliments and pretty falsehoods. Vanrenan's words stung her.

"Am I to blame if Mr. Massey prefers my society to auntie's? I don't say that he does; but if she loses him the fault lies at her own door, not mine."

"Will you tell me how you can draw such a conclusion?" calmly, with stern eyes bent on her.

"Is she not faded, and precise to a fault. Of course she cannot help her pretty looks waning; but she pleased herself when she sent him away more than eight years since. If she had loved him she could not have done that. What man's love would survive so great a separation?"

"Have you finished?" his voice sounded hoarse and strange. "Oh, Heaven! Can you forget that for your sake she sent him away, almost breaking her heart in that act?"

"She should not have considered us," insolently.

And he retorted, sharply—

"If she had not, where would you have found a refuge? But for Miss Norris you would have been a pauper child. Your mother's people disowned you; and but that you are pretty and accomplished, and Mrs. Feuntney in need of a companion, you might have starved and she not cared. Mab, be true to your womanhood; for Heaven's sake don't do this thing you meditate. Think of Elaine's perfect sacrifice of self, of youth, and love, and joy. Think of the long years in which she toiled for you, until heart and brain alike were so weary she scarce could perform her daily duties. Think of the bitter and unjust words she endured from her lover in that cruel parting. In all, through all, she never reproached you with her loss, never reminded you of benefits you carelessly took and easily forgot! Think of her long years of patient waiting, of looking for one who neither wrote nor came; remember how her faith in him never faltered. Call to your mind her gladness when at last she saw him. Oh! imagine her joy when she found (as she believed and still believes) that his love remained unchanged—how she lives in the thought that soon she will be his wife."

"Mr. Vanrenan," defiantly, "you think so highly of auntie yourself, that Gerard might well be jealous."

He stayed her with a quick, imperative gesture.

"This subject is doubtless unpleasant to

you, but my desire to spare Miss Norris pain renders me careless of your feelings. I have long known that both you and Fred are incapable of gratitude in its lowest form; that nothing she has done or can do will win from you the most meagre affection. But for decency's sake leave her this man, who, however worthless he is, alone can content her. Don't draw down upon yourself the contempt of every honest creature. Don't let it ever be said that you ate her bread, were sheltered by her roof, grew strong under her loving care, benefited by her griefs, her sacrifices, and then bit the hand that had lavished nothing but good upon you. Fred has forgotten her, or remembers her only when he needs her help; you have shown yourself glad to leave her for worldly advantage. For Heaven's sake show there is some remnant of the woman in you yet."

"Why don't you attack Mr. Massey instead of a defenceless girl. As for your accusations, I scorn to answer them," angrily, and she shrank a little from him.

"Because in answering them you would condemn yourself. They admit of no denial. And let me say that I appealed to you, thinking that one so young could not be utterly base—believing you might be deterred from doing this great wrong and embittering all your after-life! Child, if I have spoken harshly, it has been for your good and future happiness."

"I am extremely flattered by your interest in me," insolently, "but am sorry it takes so brutal a form." She stooped to remove a bramble from her dress; then, lifting herself again and facing him with bright eyes, and face so like, yet so unlike, Elaine's, said—

"Suppose we postpone the remainder of this very pleasant *little talk* until another day. I am really incapable of listening to you any longer. Good-morning, Mr. Vanrenan," and so left him.

He did not attempt to arrest or follow her, only he watched her with eyes from which all anger had gone, and in which only a vast pity for Elaine remained. Who should tell the woman he loved of the terrible grief that had drawn so near to her; certainly he could not. He could not bear to dash that newborn brightness from her face, or darken the wonderful light in her eyes. His thoughts all unconsciously framed themselves into the complaint of the poet: "Oh, love, my love! had you but loved me! Surely, surely, it had been better for her."

That evening Elaine went from home reluctantly; but a poor, sick woman had sent, begging to see her, if but for a short time, and she could not shut her heart against the appeal. It was quite dark when she returned, and at each step she hoped the next would bring Gerard in sight. She thought, with a little pang, he might have been more eager to meet her. When she reached the garden it was deserted, but she stayed a moment to gather a cluster of jasmine blooms, and fasten them at her throat. Then she went in. Her soft skirts made no noise as she moved; her step was light, and the inmates of the pretty parlour were too engrossed with each other to hear or heed her approach, so she stood in the doorway, and in the dim light saw a white figure she knew was Mab's; the man was so much in the shadow that his outline was indistinct; but he had an arm about the girl, and one of her white hands lay upon his shoulder. Faint, with a sudden, awful dread, Elaine neither moved nor spoke, and as she stood there, statue-like in her fear, the man's voice broke the silence—

"Mab, my pretty darling" and the wretched listener shivered but made no outcry, for the voice was Gerard's. Then the girl, for whom she had suffered and toiled, and been as a tender mother, uttered her fear, but in her tone there was no shadow of shame—

"Love, love, how shall we tell auntie?"

A voice, shrill with anguish, cried through the darkness—

"No need to tell her, she knows—oh,



Heaven! she knows!" and in the moment's surprise the guilty pair stood silent and confused. Then she, to whom all things were cruel, spoke again, as she slowly drew near them, "Have you hurt me enough," she said, "or will you stay to show me your joy—to contrast it with my anguish. Oh, Heaven! this was my lover, this was to have been my husband so soon, and this my niece, the child of my tenderest care. Go! go! go! your presence hurts me!"

And then Gerard spoke, whilst Mab shrank further into the darkness, being afraid. The man went quite near to the woman he had so often sworn "to love and cherish" until death, and his tones were hoarse and muffled with the consciousness of her agony and his treachery.

"Elaine," he said, "my conduct must look very black to you; but upon my honour it was not premeditated. I meant to be true to you; I strove with all my might to keep my faith, but I could not."

"Go on," she said, when he paused. "You cannot wound me more cruelly than you have already done."

"If only you had not sent me away this would not have happened," glad to cast all reproach upon her if possible. "How could I believe you loved me best? And few men would keep faith so long as I."

"Why"—she demanded, passionately—"why did you send me that message to buoy me up with false hopes? Why did you ever return to me if you were not sure of your heart? Heaven! have I not borne enough anguish that this should be laid upon me? Oh! Gerard, Gerard! you had done well to kill me rather than teach me this most cruel lesson!"

Then Mab stepped forward, a touch of generosity making her defend her lover.

"Auntie," she said, "he is not to blame. All that has happened is due to me, and me only," but Elaine cried, sharply,—

"Go away, I cannot breathe where you are. Go away, I say. I never wish to see your face again."

This was an entirely new Elaine, and Gerard was startled, whilst Mab, too frightened to consider anyone but herself, slipped from the room, and looked herself in her little upstairs chamber. When she was gone Elaine grew quieter. With a story horror on her face she drew quite close to Gerard, and peering through the gathering shadows, scanned his features with tortured eyes.

Then she said, in dull, unbroken tones,—

"You might have spared me this. You should have remembered how cruel my life has been, and so have shown me mercy. What have I done that you should so ill-treat me? Am I less fair than once I was? Your look says yes; and if so, was it not toiling for her and watching for you made me so? Oh, Heaven! I never thought to speak thus to you, but to-night—to-night I think I am mad. I have no control over myself, no sense of anything but pain. Have not these eight years been one long story of woe? Gerard! oh, Gerard!" and as she caught and clasped his hands in hers her tears fell fast; and he was glad she wept, for now, he said, "she will be calmer."

He bent over the shuddering form.

"Elaine," he said, solemnly, "you will always have my most affectionate esteem; we can always be friends."

"Friends!" she cried, with a fierce laugh, "friends, with the memory of this scene before us. No, rather let us be strangers, but the constant sight of me teaches you to hate me, because it recalls your treachery to you, and because from loving I might grow to hate you, since you have laid my whole life here."

His heart smote him then, and he laid his hand upon her arm.

"My dear, my dear, I am sorry—"

"Sorry!" she interrupted, with passionate scorn. "Oh! speak truth to me now. Your favourite dog's death would grieve you

infinitely more than my spoiled life does. Do not touch me, do not speak again—only go. I have borne too much—too much already. Let me alone. What have you to do with me any longer?"

She stayed forward, and caught at the table, he ashamed and angry moved towards the door; then all her fierce disdain died out, and she was again the gentle Elaine. She stretched out her hands to him.

"Stay; perhaps I have been too hard, and my heart feels only its own pain, even to the exclusion of yours. Oh! wish me good-bye—speak kindly—for the last time. After to-night do not let us meet again. Kiss me, because you once loved me, and because I still love you."

And then as he held her in his arms she broke into pitiful sobs that struck upon his heart and appealed to his better self.

"Elaine, my dear, my dear, what shall I say, what shall I do? If I forego my own joy to minister to yours will you be happier? Oh! don't ask such a sacrifice of me, anything but that—anything rather than give up Mab, and I will obey you even to my own cost."

In the darkness he did not see her mournfully, bitter smile, as she echoed,—

"Anything but that. Ah, Gerard, I don't say return to your allegiance, because the heart is a wild thing and soon out of control, and I know, too, that 'love once dead' does not revive again. No, all I ask is that you will leave here—Claremont—as soon as possible. I do not wish to see you any more. Say, too, to Mab that as her strength has been restored so quickly to her she has an excuse to return to her aunt. I—I cannot meet her day after day with friendly face and voice. She, too, must go. Now listen. Oh, Heaven, this is worse than death. If I have not angered you too deeply, if you have any compassion for me, say 'Heaven bless you,' and go."

Her hands were clasped behind his head, her wonderful eyes blazed in the darkness. He bent and kissed her once upon the mouth, and muttered, brokenly,—

"Heaven bless you!" and before she had time to miss the clasp of his arms he was gone, and she stood forsaken and alone in the room where he had so often protested his love.

Like one stricken with sudden blindness she felt her way to the sofa with trembling, uncertain hands, and, reaching it, fell prone upon it, almost mad with the bitter anguish of that night.

A little silvery gleam of light entered the room and pierced the gathering darkness, touched the bowed dark head lovingly, trembled over the pretty, prostrate figure; the sky grew bright with myriad stars, the moon rose higher, and the narrow streak of light became a broad, level beam, until it bathed Elaine's whole form in its silvery radiance.

Still she did not move, or lift her weary head; still no sob broke from the white lips, and no tear stained the pallor of her agonised face.

Ten o'clock struck, and Ismay grew anxious about her protracted absence.

"Doreas," she said, "where can Miss Norris be? Shall we go to meet her?"

But Doreas answered,—

"I saw her come in a long time back, and I've been wondering she didn't ring. I think there have been high words between her and Mr. Massey; and Miss Mab went to her room more than an hour ago."

With a vague feeling of alarm Ismay ran to the parlour, and, seeing Elaine prone upon the couch, cried out in alarm; and hastened to her side.

"Miss Norris! Oh! dear Miss Elaine!" she said, "what is it? Tell me, dear!" and when the weary head was lifted, and the agonised eyes met hers—

The moonbeams made the ghastly face appear ghastlier.

"Oh!" cried Ismay, "what has happened?"

Speak to me, my dear, dear friend," and began to chafe the hands that were icy cold, despite the sultriness of the evening; and yet Elaine kept that strange silence, and the wonderful eyes seemed larger and brighter in their pain than ever Ismay had seen them.

The girl's tender heart ached for the woman who had filled her mother's place so well, and her tears fell fast on the fingers she clasped in her own.

"For pity's sake! speak or cry! But do not—do not look like this; you frighten me!" And then Elaine sat up.

"Is it you, Ismay?" in a dreary voice. "How long have I been here? Why did you seek me? Leave me alone—go your way, to your pleasure and your work—the others have forsaken me, and, if you are wise, you will follow their example."

Ismay knelt by her, drew her head down upon her own breast.

"You are very miserable, or you would not counsel me to play so false a part. Oh! my friend! my friend! let others do as they will, Uncle Carey and I will always do as you. Have you—have you quarrelled with Mr. Massey?"

"We have parted!" coldly and steadily, "and he is to marry Mab. Hush! Perhaps it is better so; only just now—just now it seems so very hard!" and then the merciful tears came, and the girl did not attempt to stay them.

"Let her cry," she thought, "it will do her good and ease the pain of her heart!"

It was very late when she went to her own room, but Mab was listening for her, and when she heard her step, opened her door and called her softly.

Ismay paused reluctantly.

"What do you want, Mab?"

"I heard you talking to auntie, and I want you to tell me what she says about—about Gerard—and—"

"And you?" questioned Ismay. "She said very little, and tried not to blame either of you!"

Mab took her by the arm and drew her in, closing the door. She wheeled a chair towards the girl, but she said she preferred standing, so they faced each other, each an utter and violent contrast as is not often seen.

The tall, slim, fashionable young lady, still dressed in her laces and jewels, with her bright brown hair elaborately dressed, grey eyes and fair skin; and the schoolgirl, so uniformed in face and figure, dark as an Italian, with eyes that seemed to have opened under other than English skies, large, soft, unflinching, true and clear; and in her features there was already the promise of a higher and nobler beauty than Mab could ever bestow.

"What did auntie say?" Mab asked again, impatiently, for Ismay's steady scrutiny made her uneasy, and she felt inclined to shake her into speech.

"What Miss Norris said I shall not repeat, because it was too marvellous and kind; but I will remind you what these who learn your conduct will think of you. You are a snake in the grass, an ingrate, and Mr. Massey is a cowardly traitor."

"Thank you! I want no gratuitous insults! If you came here to make objectionable remarks, I shall be obliged if you will go at once."

Ismay Lake's pale, dark face flushed darkly, but she laughed shortly as she said,—

"Had you not invited me here I should not have come; this interview is not of my seeking, and now I will say good-night. If your dreams are pleasant, you will get more than your deserts."

All that night Elaine lay sleepless upon her bed. With the early morning she rose and went to Mab. That young lady lifted her self on her elbow, and looked a little anxiously at her visitor.

"I felt I must speak to you, and so came here to avoid interruption. Last night, perhaps, I spoke too bitterly, if so, I ask your pardon. But, henceforth, Mab, let us have

plain dealing; after what has occurred, you must feel it impossible for you to remain here. I shall be glad if you will write Mrs. Fountney, your health is so far improved that you are willing and able to rejoin her. I don't think I could bear your engagement should become public talk whilst you are here—but when you have returned to your aunt there is reason why it should not be declared. For your mother's sake I will try to forgive you, although the task is so hard a one; and for her sake I will try to meet you, when—when my grief is less sharp. That I can ever take you into my love, or hold you as dear as hitherto you have been, is impossible to me. I think I have no more to say!

Then suddenly her calmness failed her—her self-control gave away.

"Oh! why have you done this thing? Was there not trouble enough in my life that you should strike this blow? Could none of your suitors content you that you must set yourself to win him from me? Was I so hard to you in days gone by that you must needs revenge yourself thus?" and in answer to those passionate inquiries Mab could only plead, lamely,—

"I am sorry, auntie. I did not think of or mean wrong to you; and it isn't all my fault that Gerard does not love you any longer. You must see that, however prejudiced you are against me."

"Yes, I see it plainly," in her usual quiet voice. "But a clear vision isn't always the most enviable thing on earth."

And so she went downstairs to spend that day in weary labour, whilst heart and brain cried out for rest.

And Mab lay in her little chamber, alternately thinking and counting the rose-buds on the wall, feeling herself a very badly-treated young lady, indeed.

In the evening she met Gerard by appointment, and bore him this message from Elaine:—

"It is for your best happiness that you should marry Mab. I will try to be content; and the only favour I can beg of you is, that you will let me see your face no more so long as my unhappy love lasts."

By the close of the week both Gerard and Mab had left Claremont, and Carey Vanrenap felt he might once again visit the cottage.

He found Elaine looking very pale and much older. Her voice was listless and her manner languid, but she seemed pleased to see him.

As he took one small hand in his, and looked into her eyes, the love that had burned so long and steadily in his heart made him faint with its excess, but his bearing gave no sign of emotion, and his tones were calm.

"I have been a stranger to the cottage lately; but now you will let me resume my ancient privileges?" he said, and she answered,—

"Why not? There is no one to be jealous now," and smiled ever so faintly. "We shall all be glad to welcome you here again."

"Elaine," and his deep voice was stirred with pain for her pain. "If I try to tell you how my heart aches for you my words will convey but a poor idea to your mind."

"I know—I know!" she interrupted, "you have always been most good to me—have always made my troubles yours, and in all my days I have made you no return. Now, Mr. Vanrenap, teach me to live down this grief—show me how a life if spoiled need not be wasted."

"No words or teaching of mine can make that truth plainer to you than now it is, and I can only say would to Heaven I could look back upon such a record of kindnesses and self-sacrifices as you!"

She sighed as she listened to his grave voice. Perhaps the thought stirred in her heart that she had been a happier woman if she could have loved him to forgetfulness of Gerard Massey; and, perhaps, in Carey's heart there lingered a hope that she would yet turn to him.

Did not Jacob serve fourteen years for his

beautiful Rachel—and why should he complain, who, as yet, had served but six?

All Claremont was agog with the news of the broken engagement, and Elaine was compelled to bear much questioning as best she could.

Whose was the fault—his or hers? Their names were the topic for lively conversation at all social gatherings; but nothing definite could be learned until an announcement of a marriage in high life in a very fashionable paper startled the gossips, and filled them with sincere pity "for that poor Elaine Norris, who certainly deserved a better fate than to be jilted."

"We understand that a marriage has been arranged between Mr. Gerard Massey, formerly of Bombay, and son of Captain Massey, of the 6th Hussars, and Miss Mabel Norris, daughter of the late Rev. Vivian Norris, of Claremont, and grand-niece of Lady Millington. The ceremony will take place in November."

So died Elaine's hopes. And after the first bitterness of the blow had passed she rallied again, and filled her life, as formerly, with really hard work.

Of all she had toiled for none remained to her, and of those she loved two alone were faithful—Ismay Lake and Carey Vanrenap.

Truly, life did not seem desirable to have or to keep; and if at times she faltered in the way, and grew afraid of the desolate future, there was small wonder.

She was so bruised—so stricken; and it seemed to her in those days she could never rise above her grief, or be glad any more.

She counted the days as they passed—each one bringing Gerard's marriage nearer, and she would cry to her heart that she should go mad with her love and despair. But the dark cloud had a silver lining, and brighter, happier days were in store for her.

The time would come when she would almost smile at her then present grief; and, finding safe shelter in a good man's love, wonder why she had so long been blind to his nobility—why she had made herself an idol of common clay, and, falling down before it, worshipped it so well and truly. But as yet the way was rough and dark, and her soul fainted with knowledge of the long conflict before it.

Mab was very proud and very happy. She had secured an eligible *parti*, thereby pleasing Mrs. Fountney greatly, and she really was as fond of Gerard as her nature permitted her to be of any but her own sweet self. She had met with no reproach from her aunt, but rather commendation. Indeed, that lady frankly owned to the future bridegroom that she was so delighted with the alliance that she should give Mab a dowry of a thousand pounds.

Gerard was as passionate and jealous a lover as any girl could desire, even the most exacting, and in her own set it was not known that he had been Elaine's betrothed.

So everything was bright for the thoughtless, heartless girl; there was no thorn in her rose, no cloud in her sky; and congratulations poured in from every side.

Swiftly September and October passed, and her trousseau was well-nigh completed.

Mab's pretty head was turned with her success, and she could only think of pleasures and luxuries to come; of the new and beautiful home preparing for her, and nothing of her duties as wife and companion.

At last the wedding morning came, sunny and warm, although it was mid-November, and Mab, arrayed in all her bridal finery, promised "to love, honour and obey" the man beside her.

The words fell glibly from her lips, and no thought of the lonely woman at Claremont came to mar her triumph. Truly it is well to be born heartless and thoughtless.

Two days after Elaine received the cards "with Mr. and Mrs. Massey's compliments," which told her that a chapter in her life was closed, and a new one begun. Ah! what would it be?

Carey was with her when she took out the highly-embossed cards with the silver love-knot, and his face wore an expression of pain for her.

Leaning forward, he touched her hand.

"My dear," he said, and paused.

She looked up at him with a faint smile, and made answer,—

"Don't fear for me, the worst is over now," and when he had gone she unlocked her desk and took out all the little souvenirs of the past. She had no right to them now, for Gerard was another woman's husband, and throughout all time could be nothing to her.

They were not many, those little remembrances of dead days, but they were inexpressibly dear to her, and her eyes filled with tears as she looked on them. There were a few short notes written by Gerard in the very early days of their love—a few faded pansies (she remembered the words he had said when he gave them to her), a withered rose from which all fragrance had gone, a lock of hair, and a poor photo, a libel on his handsome face; last of all a poem, crude enough to excite a smile in others, but deep and tender to her, because he had written it.

Why will women keep those dreadful trifles to recall old loves, old hopes, old dreams, and wake into fresh life the anguish that has so long neither moved nor cried out to them of the irrevocable past?

With gentle hand, and lips that quivered despite her passionate effort for self-control, Elaine lifted these treasures one by one, and after kissing them, let them flutter into the fire, watching with sorrowful eyes as they slowly burned. She destroyed the portrait last.

It seemed to her she could not give that up; but then she thought of Mab and her expression resolved into firmness; only as it fell among the bright flames she could not watch its destruction. She walked to the window and looked out, beating her fingers absently upon the panes, and knitting her brows as if in deep thought. After awhile she turned again towards the fire; all that remained of her past was a few ashes.

"It is over and done with now," she thought, "and I must teach myself to forget him. He belongs to another woman, and so my love would be a sin." She locked her desk and going upstairs dressed herself for walking. "I wonder," she said in her heart, as she paced the dreary road, "I wonder if all men are as false as he? If it is so, oh! then Heaven help the women!"

She spoke no more to any of her past; the faint colour came back to her sweet face, and if her eyes looked often weary, what matter? No one heeded this save Carey, and he only showed his sympathy by deeds; of Gerard and Mab he said nothing.

And the autumn and winter passed. Spring with her manifold blossoms came and went; summer brightened and glorified the whole earth, and still Elaine toiled on, spending her small savings for Fred, who had got into a fast set, and seemed irreclaimable. She did not murmur against her lot, and as she said, "her life was too busy for useless repinings."

If she had forgotten Gerard no one knew, no one dared ask; all that was known of her was her patience and goodness, all that was felt for her was love bordering on worship.

Mab never wrote, never showed by any sign that she remembered her childhood's home, or her childhood's protector. She lived in a gay atmosphere, and was rapidly becoming a leader of fashion. She spent no hour at home that could be spent out, and her husband grew weary occasionally of the ceaseless whirl of pleasure; and although he would not confess it even to his own heart, he realized that she had no depth of character, no force of will, and that all her accomplishments were superficial.

But he loved her, and she had pretty, coaxing ways when she chose, which beguiled him into granting her all she wished almost before she had proffered her request.



Still his married life fell very far short of his expectations, but as yet he excused Mab to himself, and even defended her, saying,—

"She is so young; as she grows older things will be different."

## CHAPTER VI.

MAB had been married eighteen months, and in all that time Elaine had received no letter from her. The pain of her niece's ingratitude and forgetfulness had grown less, and striving bravely day by day she had succeeded in conquering her own unhappy love, which had survived Gerard's anger, absence, and, in short, all save his marriage.

Ismay, now almost sixteen, was anxiously waiting her parent's return to England. Colonel Lake had got his pension, and intended spending the remainder of his life in his native country.

It was a lovely June evening, and Ismay had gone to the Hall; Elaine, indisposed for walking, remained at home, busy on an elaborate piece of embroidery. As she sat there, bathed in the warm light of the setting sun, her thoughts went sadly back to old days, and she sighed as she thought her youth was gone and she must prepare to go down the hill alone.

Thirty seemed to her a great age—such a long, long remove from twenty; ah! she had been fair and beloved then. Now half her beauty was gone, and she had no lover. Gerard was false, and Carey's heart estranged because of her persistent coldness, so she thought as she sat alone; because since Mab's marriage Mr. Vanrenan had neither spoken nor shown his love.

"Oh!" with a swift pang, "was it wrong and foolish to deny him all? am I sorry now? am I sure I do not regret casting away the substance for the shadow? I miss his old tenderness, which I have learned too late to value."

Then she quietly resumed her work, a troubled look on her fair face. The window was open, and through it there came to her all sweet scents and sounds; from the road there was wafted the echo of a child's light laughter, among the bushes the birds yet sang; she heard, too, the lowing of oxen in the distant meadows, the shouts of the boys as they played in an adjoining close; but another sound reached her ear—that of a woman's swift, light tread on the gravel path, and looking up hastily she saw Mab.

She was so surprised that at first she did not move, but after a pause she started up, and going out met her niece in the hall.

Mab flung her arms about Elaine's neck, sobbing wildly; the latter, drawing her into the room, shut the door, then asked,—

"What has happened, Mab?"

"I have come home to you; there was no one else I could go to. Auntie I have left my house—run away from him," and then sobs stayed any further speech.

Elaine held the girl from her, and looked searchingly into her tear-stained face.

"Why have you done this? What has happened, and why have you left your husband, Mab?"

She made her sit down, and then said, quietly,—

"You must tell me all, that I may be the better able to advise you."

Then followed incoherent words and bitter sobs, and all Elaine could understand was that Mab "would never, never go home again," that Gerard had been "very cruel to her, and she was not to blame."

"My child," gravely, "I think there must be faults on both sides; but try to tell me your story calmly. I think you know I shall not deal harshly with you."

So Mab, who was rapidly growing frightened at her own conduct and the false step she had taken, told with many tears how for some time Gerard had seemed averse to leading such a gay existence himself, or allowing her to do so either. He had grown jealous, too, of the

attentions of a man named Lorton. There was really no need (as Mab said truly); perhaps she had been a little thoughtless, but, of course, she loved her husband very dearly, and he should have been assured of that."

"Lately," she went on, "he has been so terribly exacting, and watches me as a cat watches a mouse or a bird; that made me angry, and I would not change my line of conduct to gratify his whims. He began to say cruel things to me, and, of course, I wouldn't submit tamely to his insults, and I told him it was a pity he had ever married me as he seemed dissatisfied with me, and he had far better had been true to his first love. That put him into a violent passion; but it wasn't until last night anything seriously wrong occurred between us. I had been dining out, and he refused to go. I was not very well during the evening, and determined to leave before my carriage came. Mr. Lorton escorted me home, and no sooner had I entered than Gerard began a fearful tirade upon my conduct, telling me I was making my name a byword and a reproach to him. I was furious (as any woman would be), and this morning I waited only until he had gone out, then, not stopping to pack anything, came straight away here. Auntie, I'm very miserable. I haven't been good to you, I know, but you won't refuse me shelter!" clinging about her.

Elaine unclasped the girl's arms from round her neck.

"Sit down, Mab, until I have spoken to you, and try to remember that whatever I say is prompted by my desire to see your happiness really established. Your running away from husband and home is the worst thing you have done or could do. It will give the gossips good foundation for many a vile story—a wife who leaves her husband, after having given him cause for jealousy lays herself open to the cruellest suspicions. And even by your own showing you have acted foolishly throughout. Why, if Gerard desires a little quiet, a little rest from this ceaseless round of pleasure, cannot you deny yourself for one evening? Do you think his wishes are never to be consulted?"

"Oh!" Mab said, petulantly, "of course you will take up the cudgels in his defence. You love him."

Elaine's sweet face flushed, and one moment her eyes flashed angrily; but she said, quietly still,—

"Yes, once I loved him; but on the day in which he married you I renounced my love, and held myself absolved from every promise I had given him. Another woman's husband"—scornfully—"could have no charm for me; and if, Mab, you will not listen patiently to me I give up your case at once. Remember, that if I have borne insolence uncomplainingly before I shall not do so now."

She ceased, and Mab said, miserably,—

"Forgive me, auntie; I am so wretched. I don't know what I say, and I really did not mean to insult you. I promise to listen quietly."

"Very well. Besides your love of pleasure outside your own home you have given Gerald great cause for anger in allowing marked attention from any man; a wife cannot be too careful of her husband's honour or her own dignity. I do not suppose for an instant that you thought of the harm you were doing, and you had no woman near to warn you; but you should have remembered that Gerard is the safest guardian and adviser you can have. Please Heaven, Mab, it is not too late to make reparation. You must return at once to him before the news of your flight has spread."

But Mab cried out, desperately,—

"I dare not go back! Oh, auntie, he will never forgive me—he will never believe I love him, or—or am sorry. I wish I were dead! Oh, I wish I were dead!"

A gentle scorn stirred Elaine's heart at the sight of Mab's pitiable weakness, and her repentance that seemed so unlikely to work any

good; but her voice was almost tender when she spoke again.

"You have brought this trouble upon yourself, child, and none but you can repair the mischief. I will take you back to town."

But Mab cried out the more.

"Indeed—indeed, I dare not go; Gerard's anger will kill me! He will never take me back again, or forgive me this scandal."

"If we go at once there need be no scandal. Oh, for your mother's sake, Mab, don't let pride or fear spoil all your future life."

She knelt by the sobbing girl, and wound her arms about her waist.

"My dear, he loves you, and 'love is kind,' ready to forgive all wrongs. In pity for yourself and for him, go back; as yet none can know of your flight. So far your name is safe."

The weak, foolish little thing was weary of her sobbing, her resistance, and she really loved Gerard as much as it was in her nature to love any creature, and she knew she had been wrong, that her present distress was of her own working.

She looked, too, round the pretty, inexpensively-furnished room, and missing the luxuries of her own home, thought she could not bear to lose them, or live the humdrum existence Elaine did. So, with a sob, she drooped her head upon her companion's shoulder, and said in a childish way,—

"Take me home; I will do and say all you wish. Indeed, I will be good if only he will forgive me."

Elaine kissed her, all old resentment being gone, and feeling a great pity for the weak, butterfly creature who, out of all her friends, had chosen her to help her in her need.

"I knew," Mab said, "you would not scold or turn me away. I couldn't think of any one who would receive me kindly but you, auntie; I'm ashamed of my forgetfulness of you—in future we will be the best of friends."

But although Elaine answered, "Yes, dear," she had no faith in this sudden remorse and affection; she knew Mab's nature far too well now to be deceived by any transient feeling. She rose from her knees. The girl asked,—

"Where are you going? Oh, pray—pray don't leave me! Don't let Dorcas come to me, she will say such bitter things."

"No one will be unkind to you here," gravely. "Now you must let me go. I must get a Bradshaw, and see by what train we had best travel."

In a few moments she returned.

"There is only the mail left us to-night, and you are too weary to do the journey. Tomorrow, however, we can leave Claremont at 9.50; we shall reach town by 3.30 p.m. Now, I am going to send Dorcas to the station with a telegram."

Mab made no further protest, or indeed any remark; but lay quite silent on the couch, whilst Elaine wrote her message to Gerard.

"M— is with me. We leave here to-morrow by the 9.50 train—will come straight on to yours."

Then Dorcas entered. Ever since Mab's treacherous conduct towards Elaine she had been bitter against her, and now she guessed the young wife was in trouble through some fault of her own, so she said, austere,—

"Good-evening, Mrs. Massey. You've put Miss Elaine about a good deal, and next time you want to come it would be as well to send a message. Where's your husband? I guess he has too much grace to show himself here."

Mab began to cry again, whilst Elaine said,—

"Dorcas! Dorcas! I can't allow this."

"Oh, very well, miss," sharply; "but if I were some folks I shouldn't have impudence enough to step inside this house."

With which parting shot she took the paper from the table and stalked out, muttering to herself as she went; but Elaine soothed the unhappy girl as best she could.

Mab was so wretched, so subdued, so helpless, that she would not allow Elaine to leave

her that night; so they shared the prett room that had once been Mab's.

Early in the morning they rose and began preparations for the journey. They met Carey Vanarsman on their way to the station, and he offered his services, which Elaine declined; he then asked when she would return, and she answered certainly not later than the following day.

All the way to town Mab sat silent in a corner of the carriage, only clasping Elaine's hand tightly; and when at last the journey was ended, and they walked through the busy streets, the latter had great difficulty in persuading her companion to return to her home.

She was half dead with fright when they entered the hall, and the servant looked curiously at her, but Elaine demanded quietly to see Gerard, and was told he was in the library.

Leaving the frightened, weeping Mab in an ante-room, she went in and faced her recreant lover; he started at her entrance, and rose in confusion. Her composure was a striking contrast to his agitation.

"You received my message?" faintly extending her hand. "I have brought Mab back to you—very penitent, very miserable, and determined, if you will forgive her, not to cause you any further anxiety."

His face darkened.

"Neither she nor I deserve any kindness or consideration from you. I think you are less woman than angel."

She interrupted him gently.

"I did not come to talk of the past or listen to compliments, but in the character of mediator. Gerard, remember she is very young and thoughtless."

"I have reasoned with her often," coldly. "I have not been a hard or exacting husband; but she has chosen to view me in that light; and having shown herself weary of my control by this last act, I agree with her that we are far, far best apart."

"These you err. She loves you, and is truly sorry for all that has gone. Oh, think before you condemn her, and expose your miserable quarrel to the world. She is only a child, and very weak."

"Women younger than she are wives, and keep their husband's names free from suspicion of scandal. No, Elaine; I am willing to grant you anything but this request, because I owe you some recompense," flushing darkly at the memory of his treachery. "Ask me anything but this."

"I will take nothing else," firmly. "It is the first favour I have ever asked of you, and I will not go until you grant it. I would not wish to blame you even in seeming, or call to mind one act of yours to shame you; but as you justly have said, you owe me recompense—yes, for eight wasted years—eight years out of a lifetime. If, indeed, you are regretful—if, indeed, you would prove your repentance, why, then, give me what I ask. Oh!" catching his arm as he moved to and fro agitatedly. "Listen to me. Mab was so early left an orphan, and it may be my training fell far short of what was necessary for her; perhaps I was not wise or firm enough for my task; perhaps her life was so quiet, so monotonous, that this sudden plunge into gaiety has proved too great for her mental balance. In a fit of childish passion she left her home. Did you never err through some sudden impulse?—are you so perfect (I speak for your good, Gerard) that you can afford to judge her so severely?"

His face showed signs of relenting, and she went on eagerly, seeing that.

"Oh, friend! for the sake of old dead days, when my will was your pleasure, when nothing seemed too hard for you so that it won me to you—for the sake of the grief I have suffered, forgive Mab. Have you thought what life will be to her if you put her away? The curious glances men and women will cast on you, the malicious things they will say of you; the coldness and scorn with which they will treat your child-wife? Would you spoil your own life—for the sake of your pride—and hers,

that has scarcely yet begun? She bears your name; it should therefore be dearer to you. Her dishonour will be yours, and no years of repentance and atonement will teach the world forgetfulness of such a scandal as you will cause. Gerard, forgive her!"

He took her small, trembling hands in his.

"You prevail with me," he said, in a strangely shaken voice; "and I love her. I promise I will never reproach her with the past; that I will endeavour to understand her moods and share them. Where is she? Poor child—how wretched she must have been!"

Elaine loosed her hands from his clasp.

"You have answered as I hoped and prayed you would. Now I will bring her to you. Be very gentle with her, Gerard—she is but a weak child."

She passed out into the little ante-room, where Mab sat trembling and crying piteously.

"Come," she said; "your husband has forgiven you."

She took the young wife by the hand, and drew her into Gerard's presence. One moment Mab stood shrinking and afraid; then a voice broke the silence.

"Won't you speak to me, dear?"—and running towards him, she threw her arms about his neck, sobbing out she had been very wicked and foolish.

Elaine quietly went out, closing the door behind her.

When the reunited pair were sufficiently calm to remember her, they sought her, and begged she would stay with them; but she negatived all their entreaties firmly and gently.

"I am happiest at home," she said; and the next day saw her once more installed at The Cottage.

(To be concluded in our next.)

## FAÇETIE.

"Did any man ever yet make anything by opposing a woman's will?" exclaimed a tormented husband. "Yes, I have made a good deal by that sort of thing," answered his brother Richard. "But, Dick," responded the other, "you're a lawyer, and the woman whose will you opposed was always dead."

THE HEAD BOY'S DEFINITION OF NOTHING.—"What is nothing, William?" said I to the head boy one morning, when I and the class needed a little diversion. "I don't know that I know exactly, but as nigh as I can come to it, it is an old sock with no leg or foot, and a hole in the heel."

SHE MARRIED A COUNT.—"Ah! how dy's do, countess? Am so glad to see you home; but I was in hopes you would bring your husband with you. Let me see, it is three months since you were married, is it not?" "Yes, three months—three months," replied the countess. "The count is well, I hope?" "Yes, he is, I believe." "And I suppose you enjoyed life in his grand castle?" "For a while, yes; but you see it took all my fortune to pay off the old debts on it." "Indeed! Poor child, how I wish I could help you!" "You can." "How?" "Let me have your family washing."

DID WHAT HE WAS TOLD.

A DOCTOR sent his Hibernian servant with some medicine to a patient who was at the point of death, adding the direction:

"Be sure that you wait until the medicine is safely down his throat."

On the return of the messenger, the following took place:

"Did you give him the medicine?"

"Faith and o' did."

"Did he take it without any complaint?"

"He did that."

"Well, how did you administer it?"

"Sure I poured it down his throat?"

"Why didn't you give it to him in his hand and let him take it himself?"

"Faith he was dead."

OUT OF HIS MISERY AT LAST.—"Let me see. You know Clayson, didn't you?" "Oh, yes, I knew him well." "Well, poor fellow, he's out of his misery at last." "What! Is he dead?" "No, but his wife is."

AN EXPERT.—It was during a murder trial. A witness for the defence was in the box. "What do you intend to prove by this witness?" "That the prisoner is insane," replied the attorney. "Does the witness know anything about insanity? Is he an expert?" "Expert?" repeated the lawyer. "Well, I should say he was. He knows all about insanity. Why, your honour, he has been as crazy as a loon for the past ten years!"

OLD NICK'S SISTER.—A story is told of a shrewish Scotchwoman who tried to wean her husband from the dram-shop by employing her brother to act the part of a ghost, and frighten John on his way home. "Who are you?" said the man, as the apparition rose before him from behind a bush. "I am Old Nick," was the reply. "Come away, man," said John, nothing daunted. "Give's a shake of your hand. I am married to a sister of yours."

HER REPLY.—Brown has just had telephonic connection established between his office and house, and is very much pleased with it. "I tell you, Smith, this telephone business is a wonderful thing. I want you to dine with me this evening, and I will notify Mrs. Brown to expect you." (Speaking through the telephone.) "My friend Smith will dine with us this evening. Now listen and hear how distinctly her reply will come back." Mrs. Brown's reply came back with startling distinctness. "Ask your friend Smith if he thinks we keep an hotel!"

THE MAN WHO COLLECTS THE RENT.—Chameleon-like he can take on all complexions. I was at Jones's the other day when he called. His face was wreathed in smiles. He chuckled the oldest daughter under the chin, and kissed the baby. (He took out his receipt book, and complimented Mrs. J. upon her pretty family. Mrs. Jones, trembling, told him that "they were not quite prepared; John had lost—" Lightning comes not quicker from the clouds than a frown covered his countenance. He sprang to his feet. He tore the receipt. He kicked the cat. He swore with an ungentlemanly oath that he couldn't wait a day, that he wanted his rent, that John was a lazy rascal, that Mrs. J. ought to be ashamed of herself, though he didn't say what for. Polly, the girl he had chuckled under the chin, was bringing in a kettle of hot water. Accidentally, of course, she let it fall on his feet. It was boiling hot. I left just then; not so the man that collects the rent. It is now three weeks ago, and he has not called upon the Joneses yet—nor any one else. When he does, that rent will be ready. All they wanted was time.

UNDERHURST.

Of the two, allways give me the unblushing villain to deal with rather than the sly and slymy hipokrit.

I have learnt more from the common people than I have from the uncommon ones; the common people trust to their instincts, while the uncommon ones are ever trying to prove something they don't understand.

The man who plays his cards for all they are worth is the only one who can afford to git beat.

Gravity proves nothing, or else it proves too much.

The most improvident person is the one who mistakes niggardness for economy—"saving at the spigot and wasting at the bung," the barrel soon runs out.

He who allways aims at the bull's-eye is sure to hit it by and by, and in the meantime make menny respectable misses.

Woman's virtews are all her own; her vices, most ov them, she has learned from man.

"Physician, heal thyself"—this is a big joke on the doctor. JOSIE BILLINGS.



## SOCIETY.

THE Princess Beatrice's bridesmaids, it is stated, will be the three young Princesses of Wales, two daughters of the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh, and the Princess Irene of Hesse, as well as the daughters of Prince and Princess Christian. The town of Liverpool has offered to present a wedding-cake to the Princess on the occasion of her marriage, a gift which her Royal Highness has signified her intention of accepting.

HER MAJESTY has it in contemplation to publish selections from the public addresses of the late Duke of Albany, the services of Sir Theodore Martin being again called into requisition as editor.

THE Duke and Duchess of Connaught are expected shortly after their return from India to pay a visit to her Royal Highness's parents, the Prince and Princess Frederick Charles, in order to be present at the marriage of the Duchess's sister, Princess Henry of the Netherlands, with Prince Albrecht of Saxe-Altenburg, in May.

THE Empress of Austria is now at Amsterdam under the treatment of Dr. Morzer. In order to make excursions along the Dutch coast, her Majesty has hired Lord Alfred Paget's steam yacht *Santa Cecilia* during her stay at Zandvoort. From thence she goes to Heidelberg, where the principal part of the Schloss Hotel has been engaged for three weeks for the Royal party.

THE Marquis and Marchioness of Aberghenny were to entertain the Prince and Princess of Wales before their departure for Ireland at a ball, at which the youngest and twin daughters of the house, the Ladies Rose and Violet Nevill, were to make their debut in society.

THE wedding of the season was undoubtedly that of Sir Alexander Malet, K.C.B., Her Majesty's Ambassador at the Court of Berlin, second son of Sir Alexander Malet, Bart., K.C.B., with the Lady Emyntine Russell, younger daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Bedford, on the 19th March. It was celebrated in Westminster Abbey, in the presence of a large and distinguished congregation.

The bridesmaids, Lady Egida Hastings, the Ladies Edeline and Mary Sackville, Miss Flora Russell and Miss Cecily Sackville West (cousins of the bride) and Miss Ella St. Lo Malet (cousin of the bridegroom), were dressed alike in extremely pretty dresses of ivory white satin François over petticoats of white striped frisé velvet, the tunics being caught on one side with long sashes of white watered ribbon; and they wore Henry IV. hats of white plush trimmed with ostrich feathers. Each wore a gold brooch set in pearls, with the monogram of the bride and bridegroom in the centre in diamonds; the gift of the latter, and carried a bouquet of white azaleas and lilies of the valley.

The bride wore a beautiful dress of ivory white velours frisé, brocaded with flowers on a satin ground, and embroidered in silver and pearls. The front of the satin petticoat was lounced with point d'Alençon, and trimmed with drooping sprays of orange blossoms. She wore a wreath of orange blossoms, covered by a very large veil of point d'Alençon, fastened to the hair by diamond roses, the gift of her father; her other jewels including the diamond bracelet presented to her by the bridegroom. Her ladyship's travelling dress was composed of bronzed green cashmere over a pleated petticoat of fancy checked velvet, the bodice and drapery being turned back with velvet and gold passementerie, and she wore a Henry IV. hat of velvet trimmed with Impeyan pheasant.

The presents numbered some hundreds, and included a valuable Cashmere shawl and a pair of blue and gold china vases from Her Majesty.

## STATISTICS.

MARY is the most common name in England, 6,619 out of every 50,000 individuals answering to it. William comes next with 6,590.

THE ARMY AND VOLUNTEERS.—Recruiting seems to have improved; there were raised in the year 1884, 35,650 recruits. This not only met the loss of the year, but gave a net gain of 7,500 men serving with the colours. The number of effectives on January 1, 1884, including the rank and file and non-commissioned officers, was 172,529 men; and on January 1, 1885, it was 181,000. This progress had been maintained so far during the present year. Up to March 1 last there have been raised 7,442 recruits, and the effectives were then 184,209. The army reserve has been slightly checked, notwithstanding it increased by 4,700 men, the number being now 39,244. During the past year the total increase in the strength of the army with the colours and with the reserve has been 12,134. The militia reserve consists of 30,803 men, so that we have 70,000 reserve men liable to be called out at any moment. With regard to the volunteers, the force has increased to 208,000 men, and there has been a very satisfactory increase in the number of officers who have passed in tactics.

## GEMS.

NATURE has sometimes made a fool, but a coxcomb is always of a man's own making.

THREE things to cultivate—good books, good friends, and good humour.

INDEPENDENCE and self-respect are essential to happiness, and these are never to be attained together without work.

LIFE's real heroes and heroines are those who bear their own burdens bravely, and give a helpful hand to those around them.

THERE is on earth no greater treasure or more desirable possession for man than a woman who truly loves him.

WHEN they throw these some beneficial bones, snap at the favour; if not, sleep on and never answer to good fortune and preferment when they knock at thy door.

THERE are some critics who change everything that comes under their hand to gold, but to this privilege of Midas they join sometimes his ears!

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

TO DRESS TURNIPS.—Boil the turnips. Either mash them or cut each turnip into four pieces. If mashed, stir into them a little butter and cream. If cut into pieces, make a gravy of a little butter, a "dust" of flour, and cream or milk, and let it stew for a short time.

BEEFSTEAK BROTHED IN ONIONS.—Take a juicy beefsteak, two inches thick; broil it nicely; then have ready six onions, sliced, and fried brown in butter. Be careful not to let them burn. Fry them a light brown. When the steak is done and ready to serve, put several lumps of butter upon the steak; and pour two tablespoonfuls of water upon the steak; then pour on the hot onions, and serve immediately. The onions should be allowed to lie in salt and water for an hour, and then wiped dry, before putting them into the butter to fry.

VIAL CAKE.—Cut a few slices from a cold fillet of veal. Place a layer of the meat at the bottom of a flat mould or pie-dish; next put a little grated or sliced cooked ham, and hard-boiled eggs, also cut up. Then another layer of veal, and so on until the mould is full enough. Have ready about one pint of good brown gravy, well seasoned, dissolve three-quarters of an ounce of gelatine in a little water, stir it into the gravy, and let it simmer over the fire for a minute or two. Then add a glass of sherry, pour over the meat, and, when cold, turn out.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

A CORNWALL woman has no name. She is always somebody's daughter, sister, wife, or mother. Their individual existence is not recognised even by name.

THE largest mat in the world, it is said, covers the circus-ring of the Covent Garden Theatre. It is made of unbleached coconut fibre, and has a soft pile four inches thick; its weight is more than two tons.

A PIANOFORTE railway carriage is being built in Birmingham, for the London and North-Western Railway. "Appliances will be provided by which the sound of the carriage wheels will be deadened, so as to preserve the harmony of the music."

LITTLE BEAMS.—The sunshine of life is made up of very little beams that are bright all the time. To give up something when giving up will prevent unhappiness; to yield, when persisting will chafe and fret others; to go a little round rather than come against another; to take an ill look or a cross word quietly rather than resent or return it; these are the ways in which clouds and storms are kept off, and a pleasant and steady sunshine secured.

TACT.—An astute man who understands the machinery of success without being able to enter into the impulsive or the sentimental side of life is not rightly termed a person of tact; one on the other hand, whose sympathies are sensitive, but who, from carelessness or rash good nature, seldom looks before he leaps, should equally be denied this designation. It is just because the two elements that tact unites are so rarely found adequately developed together that tact is, in truth, something which a man can wear or discard at will; it requires an effort for its exhibition, and if the effort be withdrawn, it also disappears.

OLD MELODIES.—English glees, catches, songs and dance music, are known and admired all over the world. Some of the most ancient popular melodies of the English are fortunately preserved in a little manuscript of the age of Queen Elizabeth, called "Queen Elizabeth's Virginal Book," containing airs that are still popular among the peasantry, such as "The Carman's Whistle," or "The Jolly Miller," and Shakespeare's favourite melody, of which he makes honourable mention: "Sing it to the air of 'Light o' Love.'" These exquisitely pathetic tunes sung by Ophelia in *Hamlet* are admired by all musicians, and are far older than history can trace. So famous are the English for their proficiency in singing that before the Reformation the churches of Belgium, Holland and France sent to England for choristers; and one of the most valuable collections of popular English music that exists was published in Amsterdam at the commencement of the seventeenth century. Such noble tunes as "The King Shall Enjoy His Own Again," "Crop Eared Roundheads," "The Girl I Left Behind Me," "Farewell Manchester!" "Packington's Pound," "Balance a Straw," "The Vicar of Bray," "The British Grenadiers," "Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes," "Down Among the Dead Men," "The Man Who Will Not Marry Me," "The Miller of Dee," "Begone, Dull Care!" "Tis My Delight on a Shiny Night," and others may be cited as fair specimens of English popular and traditional music. Its general characteristics are strength and martial energy. It has a dashing, impulsive, leaping, frolicsome spirit, occasionally overshadowed by a touch of sadness. It has not the tender melancholy of the music of Ireland, nor the light airy grace, delicate beauty and heart-wrung pathos of the songs of Scotland, but it has a lift and style of its own. In one word, the music of England may be described as "merry;" and her national songs partake of the same character; and are jovial, lusty, exultant, and full of life and daring.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

A. K. S.—1. Your suggestion will be duly considered.  
2. Your penmanship is excellent.

R.—We presume you refer to belladonna, which is used for dilating the pupil of the eye. Let it alone.

ROSEMOND.—The word chickens will be found in Matthew, chapter xliii, verse 37.

B. C. R.—Wait for the young man to offer an explanation. Invite other company.

AMY B.—Algeria belongs to the French. It is on the north coast of Africa, and its capital is Algiers.

W. S. M.—If the young fellow really loves you he will soon follow you and make some sign. If not it is no use to fret about him.

A. N. S.—The word Mahdi, meaning prophet, is pronounced as a word of two syllables, the "a" being very broad, and the "i" having the sound of "ee."

L. M. R.—There are already a few good female surgeons in the large cities, but none, as yet, in the first rank of the profession.

S. S. H.—The Ferdinand, to whom you refer, is Ferdinand I. Emperor of Germany. Philip's first wife was Mary, Queen of England. It was, of course, Charles, not Philip, who was Ferdinand's son.

M. J. R.—You need not fear any legal interference on account of the marriage, but you will have to encounter some social prejudice, especially if the young lady has been a member of your household.

STARLIGHT.—If there is any chance that the old gentleman will after a while give his consent to your marriage, you should certainly defer it, and "let time ameliorate his wrath."

O. C. L.—You had better not go out with this gentleman until you know more of his intentions, and whether he is engaged to another lady. Take the advice of your mother, if possible, or of some older person.

S. F. D.—Pearls are obtained from the pearl oyster. It is thought by some scientific persons that the pearl is a sign of disease in the oyster, and that if it were left long enough in the shell it would finally occasion the oyster's death. Imitation pearls are made so skillfully that nearly everybody except experts are deceived by them.

L. C. W.—1. The seven wonders of the world were the Egyptian pyramids; the mausoleum erected by Artemisia; the Temple of Diana at Epesus; the wall and hanging gardens of Babylon; the Colosseum at Rhodes; the statue of Jupiter Olympus; and the Pharos, or watch-tower, at Alexandria. 2. No; they all more or less injure the hair. The hair enclosed is a pretty light brown.

M. G. F.—Sir Walter Raleigh, in the reign which succeeded that of Queen Elizabeth, met with a change of fortune. He was tried and condemned for high treason, and remained in the Tower thirteen years, when he was released. He was subsequently rearrested on a charge made by an ambassador of Spain, and beheaded on his former sentence.

S. T. B.—If the young lady, on arriving at her residence, were forced to enter the house, it would be proper for her to invite him to do so. But if she should not invite him in, he should take his leave as soon as he bids him good-night. It would be improper for him to ask permission to go in if she did not invite him to do so.

E. L. D.—We cannot approve of the way in which you were forced into marriage, but now that you are married and beloved by your husband, we advise you to endeavour to love him, and prove a loyal and devoted wife. You will not find this difficult if you will strive to cultivate a happy temper, and enter into your husband's plans heartily.

L. C. A.—By virtue of his mere position the Prime Minister of England does not necessarily wield a large share of the executive power of the realm. The Queen is sovereign, and may accept or reject the advice of her counsellors at her pleasure. If the Prime Minister can command a majority in Parliament, and has the ear and confidence of his sovereign, so that she is willing to yield implicitly to his counsels, he is probably entrusted with greater power than any other man in the world; but the mere place does not necessarily give him such control.

G. K.—England's commercial relations compelled her to take charge of Egypt. The Soudanese rebelled against Egypt, justifiably enough, but when they refused to allow the Egyptian soldiers to leave the country in peace, public sentiment in England called upon the government to do something for these soldiers. Gordon went to settle things, if possible, failed, asked for help, and so England has been drawn in to suppress a rising of a sorely-oppressed people against a vile government. Gordon obtained the name of "Chinese" by his services to the Chinese Government in suppressing the Tai-ping rebellion.

S. C. A.—One of the best disinfectants is made by mixing a quart of cold water, two ounces sugar of lead, and two ounces of aquafortis. For small vessels use it in full strength. For general fumigating add six or eight quarts of water. This is too dangerous, however, to be left about in a family, especially where there are ignorant domestics, or young children. The deliquescent chloride of aluminum is non-poisonous, free from odour, and an excellent disinfectant, but it is not cheap enough for common use. Carbolic acid is much used,

but if strong is not safe to be left about the house. There is nothing, perhaps, for common use better than chloride of lime. The old recipe prescribed a pound to four gallons of water, but less than half this strength, say half-a-pound to five gallons of water, is sufficient for ordinary use. It may be mixed thoroughly, allowed to settle, and then poured off and kept for use in well-corked bottles. It can be sprinkled about a room, or kept in a shallow basin and allowed to evaporate. Pour into wash-basins, closets, etc.; it is a great cleanser and purifier, and may be used safely.

LAWRENCE.—If you are sure you love the young lady, and think that she would make you a good wife, you should not let your youth keep you from securing her. As you are young, you can wait a few years before marrying.

R. S. M.—Photograph paper is covered with a thin film of albumen, made from the white of eggs. It is bought already prepared by the photographer. For the subsequent process we have no recipe of practical value.

BESS.—You should be as kind to him as possible at such times. He probably becomes very nervous under the excitement consequent upon trying to sell his invention and the seemingly near approach of success, and you should all patiently bear with his temporary crosses.

F. N. S.—Your self-respect should teach you what to do in such a case. You should not permit any man to trifle with you in such a way and make you a subject of public gossip. Decline to accept the young man's attentions until he "comes to the point" sufficiently to make a choice between you.

D. M. G.—Do not marry until you can give your heart with your hand. A lady should give great weight to an earnest suitor who offers his hand in marriage. It is the truest and highest compliment. It is very mean for a man to threaten a young lady. No one but a blackguard will do it.

NO CROSS, NO CROWN.

Little crosses—little crowns,  
Gloom or gladden every day;  
Steppin'-stones the crosses are,  
Crowns—the mile-stones on the way!

Hard-won crowns of self-denial,  
Crowns of hope and faith combined;  
Crowns of love, and crowns of patience,  
Light the crosses of mankind.

Christian, when the journey's ended,  
From thy shoulders bend and aye,  
God will lift the cross, and bid thee  
Wear a crown for evermore.

J. L. J.

EFFIE.—We advise you to endeavour to win your husband to a better spirit. He must have reasonable hours when you can talk with him. You are doing right in remaining with him. Try to be amiable, and you will be able to overcome all of your trouble. A wife has great advantages with her husband. Unless he is a very bad man he can be won over.

A. M. G.—That would depend upon the precise terms of your bargain. If the potatoes were sold to you out-and-out, so that you actually owned them from the day of the purchase, and if the farmer kept them in his barn free of charge, and merely to accommodate you, then the loss would be yours. But if the sale of the potatoes was conditional on their delivery to you, so that until their delivery they belonged to the farmer, then he would have to stand the loss.

AMISA.—The French "digérer" corresponds almost exactly to the English verb "to digest," and your sentence is best translated: "He is found every day in those salons, where he lives,—digests, if he has the wherewithal within him." This will be accurate, whether the digesting is a physical or a mental process; if the process is mental, your translations, although not accurate, would not be wrong, but "digest" is right in either case, for we apply the word to mental processes, as in the phrase, "Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest."

C. S. J.—The young man's statement that you were the first girl he ever met that objected to being kissed was doubtless untrue, if he meant that every girl he had ever before met was willing to be kissed by him. He was, of course, shocked by your reproof, and had to say something. According to your description of his penitential mood, it will be safe for you to treat the young man kindly hereafter. It is not likely that he will attempt to kiss you again unless you should give him clearly to understand that your views on the subject of kissing had undergone a change from what he had supposed they were.

D. M. G.—Lentils, it is said, are pre-eminently fitted by nature to favour the formation of good and slightly teeth, owing to the earthy matter principally composing them. Hence, children prior to the secondary dentition, if frequently fed on lentils, will have fine, permanent teeth, remarkable for prime enamel. Lentils also rank as high as the best of beans for nutritive purposes, and are more palatable and more digestible than either a beans or peas. Pearled or bulled wheat, cooked in a farina-bulder, the inner part being of china or queensware, and whole wheat de-branned, and unbolted flour also conduce to having sound, enduring teeth, due to the presence of the phosphates and other factors lost by bolting the flour. Rye, albeit not as good for growing people as wheat, comes next, provided there be no

bolting. The parts of rye lost by bolting are very palatable and fragrant, more so than the corresponding ones of wheat. Rinsing the mouth with tepid water, if handy, after eating, is equally important, for bits of meat and the juices of several kinds of fruit, notably the sub-acid kinds, especially pears and strawberries, are very corroding. Sudden changes of temperature by way of articles put into the mouth are hurtful to the teeth.

L. V. P.—You had better wait until the old gentleman has won your heart before you become his wife. You would not be likely to make him happy unless you were entirely uninfluenced by his weakness before you met him. You should regard his happiness before your own. With this in view you cannot make a mistake.

A. M. G.—It is said that by holding himself suspended in the air with his hands on an elevated beam, a young person can lengthen himself somewhat. We think it probable. Sleep increases bulk, and probably length. You should sleep eleven hours. Ten o'clock is a good hour for retiring.

C. C. R.—Have you proposed for the hand of the young lady? Probably she may be tired of waiting for you to declare yourself. The presents belong to the young lady, and it is proper for her to retain them. It is very mean in any young man to demand the return of presents.

A. A.—Do not be impatient to be loved. Love comes from pleasant associations and natural affinity. Be gentle, loyal and natural with your friend. If these qualities do not win him, you cannot do better than to favour other company. Do not be in a hurry. You are too young to marry.

G. V. M.—If the young man is at all interested in you he will not allow this to destroy the friendship which has subsisted between you. You might write a letter of condolence to him on the death of his relative. It is foolish for young people to engage in sentimental correspondence before they are betrothed.

LIZIE.—According to your statement, the only grounds you have for supposing your friend's beau to be a bad man are the reports of your brother. First does your brother actually know about the man? Then ascertain that, so as to be sure you have got at the real facts, and then you will be in a better position to judge of your duty, as you call it. As a rule, it is better for a girl not to meddle in such matters. Should you find that the man's character is actually bad it would be well for you to consult your parents about the matter, so as to have whatever is done, done with discretion and good judgment.

S. C. T.—For your girl friends' album we give you these lines:

TO ALICE AND HELEN.

If names reflect their wearers' characters,

As chances oft, a happy lot is hers

Who with her friends two names so fair may write,

Alice and Helen, nobleness and light!

It is better simply to write your name and the date in a boy's album. You will find the quotation, "Buy the truth and sell it not," in Prov. xlii. 23. Your handwriting is very good for a person of your age.

R. F. N.—To tan any kind of fur skins, after having cut off the useless parts, and softened the skin by soaking, remove the fatty matter from the inside and soak it in warm water for an hour. Next, mix equal parts of borax, saltpetre, and glauca salt, in the proportion of half-an-ounce each for each skin, with sufficient water to make a thin paste. Spread this with a brush over the inside of the skin, and double the skin together, flesh side towards, and place it in a cool place. After standing twenty-four hours, work the skin clean, and apply in the same manner as before, a mixture of one ounce of sal soda, half-an-ounce of slowly together without being allowed to heat. Fold together again and put it away in a warm place for twenty-four hours. After this, dissolve four ounces of alum, eight ounces of salt, and two ounces of carbonate of soda, in sufficient hot rain water to saturate the skin. When cool enough not to scald the hands, soak the skin in it for twelve hours, then wring out and hang it up to dry. When dry repeat this soaking and drying two or three times, until the skin is sufficiently soft. Lastly, smooth the inside with fine sand paper and pumice stone.

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